

KNOWING AL-QAEDA

The Epistemology of Terrorism

**Edited by CHRISTINA HELLMICH
AND ANDREAS BEHNKE**

RETHINKING POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL THEORY



KNOWING AL-QAEDA

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Knowing al-Qaeda

The Epistemology of Terrorism

Edited by
CHRISTINA HELLMICH and ANDREAS BEHNKE
University of Reading, UK

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This book began with a chance hallway discussion between the editors about the nature of al-Qaeda in November of 2008. Unsurprisingly in the light of both the many conflicting accounts of that group and the different methodological backgrounds of the discussants, no consensus was reached. But instead of 'agreeing to disagree', new questions emerged: *How* do we know al-Qaeda? What kind of ideas, views and truth claims are we advancing in the attempt of making sense of this phenomenon?

We are grateful for the encouragement from several colleagues at the Department of Politics and IR and the generous support of the Leverhulme Trust through the University of Reading's Liberal Way of War Programme to develop the initial idea into a concrete research project. Nelly Lahoud, Philip Giddings and Alan Cromartie offered generous and critical feedback during the conceptualization stage. The graduate students enrolled in the 'Terrorism in a Globalizing World' module offered fascinating responses as new ideas were tested and the debates unfolded. Particular thanks are owed to the authors who contributed to this volume for suspending their judgment on what al-Qaeda really is and their willingness to engage with the different processes through which it has become manifest in our individual and collective realities. It is through their different angles and perspectives that this project has come to life. Several of the contributions to this book were presented at a workshop on 'Knowing al-Qaeda' at the University of Reading on 2 December 2009, and at a panel of the same title at the PSA conference in Edinburgh, on 1 April 2010. We are grateful for the balance of patience and enthusiasm of our editor at Ashgate, Rob Sorsby, and the generous feedback of two unknown reviewers as this project came to completion.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: al-Qaeda and Terrorism as a Challenge to Knowledge

Andreas Behnke and Christina Hellmich

Ten years after 9/11, al-Qaeda continues to embody the enigmatic new reality of terrorism. Since perpetrating the most destructive act of terrorism to date on 11 September 2001, it has dominated discussion of national and international security in the media as well as in academic and policymaking circles. Who would do such a thing, and why? What sense does it make to fly planes into buildings? What possible political purpose can such an act achieve? Ten years into the global war against terrorism, one would expect to find clear answers to these basic, though critically important, questions. Yet despite the fact that few issues have generated more substantial debate than the task of explaining the rationale and appeal of spectacular mass murder in the name of Islam, speculations about the nature and extent of the group continue to run rife. Indeed, a closer look at the extant literature on the subject generates more questions than answers. Is al-Qaeda a rigidly structured organization, a global network of semi-independent cells, a franchise, or simply an ideology which has captured the imagination of Muslims in different parts of the world? Was Osama bin Laden an engineer, a business-school graduate, a playboy or a university dropout? What is meant by talk of the 'global Salafi-jihad' that is allegedly confronting the West? Ten years after 11 September 2001, al-Qaeda remains an enigma. Yet, the purpose of this book is not to solve this puzzle by means of adding yet another explanatory narrative to the many already in existence. Rather, it is interested in the variety of different explanations, the processes by which terrorism and the spectral entity of al-Qaeda are made objects of scientific, cultural, and political knowledge. Put simply, how is al-Qaeda known? What version of it emerges as a result of various discursive processes of trying to make sense out of what appeared to be a senseless act and out of the terrorist campaign that followed it, and what are the political consequences of these different interpretations of what al-Qaeda is?

The starting-point and underlying assumption of this inquiry is the view that the attacks of 9/11 was an act as terrifying as it appeared to be meaningless. The spectacular acts of destruction in New York and Washington DC literally came out of the blue and took the Western world by surprise,¹ launching a rollercoaster of uncertainty, fear and speculation. Indeed, a striking feature of the early days following the attacks was the circulation, and recirculation, of pictures – close-up images of the collapsing Twin Towers and of people literally jumping to their

death – which engrained the experience of the event into the consciousness of all those who watched in disbelief. At the same time, little room was allocated to text – meaningful analysis and explanations of what had happened. In many ways, the inescapable presence of those horrifying images in newspapers and on television screens was the visual evidence of a mounting confrontation of the bewildered Western world with questions to which there were no easy answers, upsetting Western assumptions about basic principles of the conduct of politics and the liberal political order. 11 September 2001 could be said to be the opening of a blank page on which the narrative about al-Qaeda had yet to be written.

In more theoretical terms, and in order to capture this particular ‘state of mind’, ‘9/11’ is referred to here as an ‘event’ in the sense that Jacques Derrida defines it, that is, as an act of historic proportions that resists immediate subsumption under a given structure of meaning, law, or truth, yet which due to its spectacular nature cries out for speedy analysis, definition and categorization. However, this ‘appropriation’ of the event falters in the absence of a given and self-evident horizon of anticipation and experience.² Observers in the USA and in the West simply did not have cognitive or discursive frameworks readily available through which to make sense of 9/11. It is therefore the very ‘event’-character of this incident that induces the persistent, endlessly incomplete search for meaning with regard to 9/11 and al-Qaeda. This ‘meaninglessness’ of 9/11 does not stem from any metaphysical or transcendental quality of the act itself. Rather, it emanates from the difficulty, if not impossibility, of making sense of it by means of traditional Western concepts of politics and the Political. A number of peculiar features of the attack and its perpetrators come to mind here. The spectacular scope of the attack itself seemed to amount to more than the regular terrorist act in the traditional sense. Rather, it was more akin to an act of war, yet perpetrated by a non-state actor. What was previously the prerogative of the state – the waging of war – had now been spectacularly enacted by a radical religious group inspired by an ideology which refers back to the early Middle Ages (according to the Western timeframe), yet with means available only to the postmodern age. And whilst war in the Western imagination is a continuation of politics by other means, 9/11 confronted the US and the West with a strategy, purpose and goal that seemed to lie beyond the political realm. The radical religious rhetoric of al-Qaeda, the uncompromizing nature of its demands for a different global order, based on religious, transcendental truths, and the willingness of its fighters to die for their cause, exploded the conceptual framework of modern Western conceptions, which have always considered the realm of politics to be limited to this side of the Great Beyond. Yet if the threat of death can no longer serve as the ultimate sanction by which to maintain political order, Western notions of the Political are effectively exploded. As Michael Ignatieff’s initial response to 9/11 expresses it:

After the initial shock of September 11, it seemed reasonable to argue that terrorism must be understood, like war, as the rational pursuit of political objectives by other means. But September 11 was not politics by other means.

(...) What we are up against is apocalyptic nihilism. The nihilism of their means – the indifference to human costs – takes their actions not only out of the realm of politics, but even out of the realm of war itself. The apocalyptic nature of their goals makes it absurd to believe they are making political demands at all. They are seeking the violent transformation of an irremediably sinful and unjust world. Terror does not express a politics, but a metaphysics, a desire to give ultimate meaning to time and history through ever-escalating acts of violence which culminate in a final battle between good and evil. People serving such exalted goals are not interested in mere politics.³

The idea of the ‘meaninglessness’ of 9/11 was further solidified by a peculiar disinterest on the part of Western societies with regard to al-Qaeda’s own narrative. Despite the organization’s, and in particular Osama bin Laden’s, continued effort to communicate his broader message – by means of open letters, propaganda videos, and statements released over the internet – his voice remained largely unheard. Until the publication of his central public speeches, letters and interviews in 2005, only fragments of his statements were available in English translation.⁴ Similar to the way that former First Lady Laura Bush urged parents to shield their children from the horrific images of 9/11,⁵ the adult Western audience has largely been shielded from the voice of bin Laden, almost as if hearing him unedited posed a threat to the national wellbeing. The selected parts of his statements that have been reproduced in the Western media tended to focus on controversial proclamations that call for the use of violence against Western targets and hence provided only a partial glimpse of the broader agenda rather than accurately representing it in its entirety. In the light of the nature and scope of al-Qaeda’s terror that upset and destabilized Western conceptions of the Political and of politics, it appears that the irrelevance of their narrative was a foregone conclusion. As Audrey Cronin, author of *How Terrorism Ends*, fittingly put it: ‘You cannot negotiate with a terrorist group who seeks nothing less than the complete destruction of everything we are.’⁶ Her statement encapsulates the widely held belief that with an enemy of such radical, fundamentalist orientation, no meaningful political or communicative action is possible. Western governments and international organizations such as NATO hastened to proclaim that they would never negotiate with terrorists, and that their demands and claims were therefore a priori invalid, to be silenced and ignored.

In the absence of any self-evident structure of meaning, and given the adamant unwillingness of Western institutions to heed the organization’s own narrative, al-Qaeda’s campaign of terrorism is thus a form of political violence that poses first and foremost an epistemological problem – a problem of political knowledge and interpretation – rather than one of gathering all relevant facts. Before anyone can even begin to contemplate how to fight this threat, before an effective strategy against this threat can be formulated, it needs to be understood and thereby made ‘meaningful’. Yet such a process can never be accomplished *ex nihilo*, or hope to produce perfect and objective knowledge. All knowledge is produced within particular frames of reference, and thus relies on underlying

ontological assumptions and normative commitments. Thus, whilst for a Liberal like Ignatieff, 9/11 calls for a war against terror within which the West affirms its moral superiority against the forces of nihilism,⁷ for a Realist like Kenneth Waltz, the same event changes virtually nothing in the great scheme of power politics.⁸ How we (in the West) understand, and what we know about al-Qaeda in particular, and terrorism in general, is thus always a matter of such prior frames of reference. The initial shock to our epistemic systems thus seemed to produce responses that tell us more about the assumptions underlying these frames of reference than about al-Qaeda and its terrorism itself.

Ten years after 11 September, such an investigation into the framing of al-Qaeda is as relevant as ever. At the time of writing, the death of Osama bin Laden at the hand of US Special Forces led to yet another reassessment of al-Qaeda's structure and his role within it. Had the organization's terrorism campaign indeed disintegrated into what Marc Sageman refers to as a leaderless jihad, or do the documents allegedly found in the compound in Abbottabad 'demonstrate' that bin Laden was in fact an effective leader of a continuously hierarchical organization? Does the so-called 'Arab Spring', the popular uprising which began in early 2011 in many Arab countries of the Middle East, indicate the ultimate demise and irrelevance of al-Qaeda and its fundamentalist ideology, or will the destabilization of established regimes provide the organization with political opportunities? Again, what answers we will find for these questions will depend to a great extent upon our assumptions about the structure and political role of terrorism in the 21st century.

Whilst accepting the challenge that terrorism poses to our systems of knowledge, and to our structures of meaning and truths, this publication's contributors do not seek to provide their own individual explanatory narratives of what al-Qaeda is and what its violence means. The common thread of the chapters in this book is an interest in the various political and politicized frameworks of reference that are deployed in order to *make sense* out of an opaque organization and its incomprehensible violent acts. Judgment as to al-Qaeda's nature is expressly suspended; instead, the chapters here investigate different political, cultural, and scientific fields in order to understand the conceptual and epistemic frameworks that are invoked in the process of others scholars attempting to reach such conclusions. We thus take the notion of 'making sense' literally: sense, or meaning, is always a product that involves and draws on particular methodological resources which, if they do not determine, then at least significantly influence, renderings of al-Qaeda and its violence.

Christina Hellmich's chapter, *Here Come the Salafis: The Framing of al-Qaeda's Ideology Within Terrorism Research*, begins this inquiry into how al-Qaeda is understood with a critical assessment of various attempts to explain al-Qaeda's *raison d'être*. Whilst commentators variously attempted to portray al-Qaeda adherents as madmen, religious hypocrites, Wahhabis of the twenty-first century or Salafi-Jihadists, what these approaches have in common is what might be described as an 'outside-in' perspective that assumes a concept of the underlying logic of al-Qaeda without sufficient reference to primary sources of evidence

and excludes alternative approaches that would have offered a different reality. The chapter argues that particularly those explanations that seem to have become the official wisdom regarding the fundamental logic of al-Qaeda, Wahhabism and the Salafi-Jihadist discourse, are concepts that are distinguished schools of thought only within the realm of terrorism studies and are in fact subject to much controversy in the broader fields of Middle East and Islamic studies. Knowing al-Qaeda in this case is about referring to particular stereotypes, categories, that are, upon critical inspection, quite unhelpful. In the anxious quest to explain al-Qaeda, the terrorism studies community deviated from the guidelines of academic conduct and instead contented itself with recycling old oversimplifications of the complexity of Islamic thought and positing new ones, thereby granting those oversimplifications a lease of life. But whilst the 'Salafi-jihadi' theory label continues to stick, it offers no explanation of the lingering appeal of bin Laden's messages amongst a wide tranche of the Islamic faithful or of the fact that many ordinary Muslims across the world have declared him a Muslim hero.

Moving on from the ideological manifestations of al-Qaeda, Anna M. Agathangelou's chapter, *Anxieties of Global Empire: Politics of Visibility Epistemologies and 'Terror'*, embeds an analysis of the epistemology of visibility of terror and terrorists within a radical postcolonial critique of existing power structures that are reflected and shaped in images and icons. Herein, images of al-Qaeda and of bin Laden become sites of a struggle over global power relations; they are made and read in order to sustain and legitimize political and economic structures of domination. Based on Fanon, Mbembe and other postcolonial writers,⁹ Agathangelou articulates, what she calls an 'onto-slave-cratcic visibility' that structures species (i.e. flesh), subjectivities, experiences, and positionalities. Within this framework, the images she reads point to the ways dominant leaders and agents of power constitute a white supremacy complicit in reinforcing racial and gender objects of desire for gratuitous violence that underpin an existential practice and everyday life called the world with Europe as its leader. This project extracts people from their communities and kills them. Drawing on Fanon, she argues that the relationship of visibility is onto-politico affectively-structural; it makes possible some realities at the expense of others with dire effects on some and the accrual of power to others. Hence, by giving terrorism a face, terrorism becomes re-coded within an anthropocentric register: as a problem to be tackled by finding 'the evildoers' and 'smoking them out'. Not only is the 'shadowy network' of al-Qaeda and its leader thereby located into the realm of the visible and thus 'actionable', the visualization of bin Laden also establishes him as the racially and sexually charged deviant and coherent other. It is within this visual(ized) register that the US can generate and implement its War on Terror – a campaign, Agathangelou argues, that is itself made possible by relentless and gratuitous terror.

Continuing the discussion over the framing of the enemy in the War on Terror, Lars Berger's chapter, *Conceptualizing al-Qaeda and US Grand Strategy*, examines the political determinants and implications of how al-Qaeda has been portrayed and framed within different traditional US foreign policy discourses

'post-9/11'. By comparing the respective renderings of al-Qaeda within the isolationist, the defensive and the offensive realist, and finally the liberal discourse, Berger is able to demonstrate the extent to which the US debate on al-Qaeda, and how (or whether) to fight it, is inextricably embedded within specific ontologies of international politics and long-held convictions about the global role which the United States can and should play. Thus, for Isolationists, the war against terror is at best futile, and at worst serves only to further stoke the flames of fundamentalist violence against the US. Within this discourse, al-Qaeda is constructed predominantly in terms of an orientalised, irrational other, unable to understand the inherent benevolence of American foreign policy, and thus not an appropriate interlocutor for the US administration. Realist responses emphasize the need to respond militarily to the terrorist threat, thus casting al-Qaeda as a predominantly military agent. As Berger demonstrates, they do differ, however, as to the scale of the military action necessary to fight the organization, with defensive realists arguing the case for a more disaggregated and selective engagement than offensive realists. Finally, it is within the liberal discourse that terrorism is read as a threat to an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, in which soft power plays an increasingly significant role. It is this discourse that pays most attention to, and emphasizes the particular nature of al-Qaeda as an increasingly globalized network. Moreover, within this discourse, international cooperation between states and a shift towards intelligence and police cooperation takes on a more prominent role.

In *Measuring al-Qaeda: The Metrics of Terror*, Rashmi Singh addresses a central aspect in the War on Terror: how does the US administration know that it is winning it? What metrics are deployed in order to give us a measure of our efforts and the effects they have? In line with the critical approach of this book, the chapter moves beyond the technicalities of data production and focusses on the epistemological problems associated with such an endeavour. What is measured and to what effect? Singh demonstrates that the metrics of the War on Terror are problematic on a number of counts. Firstly, their formulation reflects the contested nature of the concept of 'terror'. Struggles over political legitimacy and order cannot be measured in terms of a 'body count', or by using other quantitative data such as the elimination of terrorist cells, the decapitation of the leadership, or the blocking of funds. Secondly, the Bush administration's 'score cards' on which they outlined the goals of the War on Terror are different from Department to Department, and more often than not directed towards the manipulation of public opinion, rather than employed as a metrics in the usual sense. Thirdly, the formulation of these US government's metrics for the War on Terror is deeply imbued with discursive constructions of self and other. As such, the formulation of supposedly 'objective' measurements upon critical reflection reveals assumptions about the USA's exceptional role in the world and the concomitant construction of al-Qaeda as a global opponent that defines the challenge and thus the incitement for this role within the War on Terror. The knowledge produced by the metrics in

the War on Terror therefore always already reflects deep-seated assumptions about identities and purposes that precede any actual empirical encounter.

Turning from conceptual, definitional and quantitative engagements with al-Qaeda and bin Laden to the quotidian experience of terrorism, Andreas Behnke's chapter *Fear as Sovereign Strategy and the Popular Tactics of Laughter*, approaches the problem of knowing al-Qaeda from a phenomenological perspective. His chapter focusses on the way in which the US Department of Homeland Security's Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS) produced and structured this experience for US citizens through a simple colour scheme, denoting five particular 'threat levels' from Low/Green to Severe/Red. Drawing on de Certeau's work on everyday life,¹⁰ Behnke analyses the HSAS as a central sovereign strategy through which the US administration under President Bush structured knowledge and ignorance about terrorism in a fashion that turned the fear of terrorism amongst the American public into a general epistemic fear. Because the administration never provided any information about the reasons for raising or lowering the threat levels, the HSAS became in effect entirely self-referential. And whilst the designation of threats and threat levels indicates the state's knowledge of the threat it faces, this knowledge is at the same time withheld from society and its citizens, depriving them of a central tenet of democratic societies: the ability of citizens to gather information about, review, and criticize, governmental policies and decisions. Knowledge thus becomes part of a sovereign strategy that turns potential and manifest threats of terrorist acts into a general condition or state of fear. In effect, then, the US administration's HSAS attempts to perpetuate the discrete experiences of terrorist attacks into a continuous trauma in which the diffuse expectations of 'worse things to come' constitutes a new exceptional normality. Yet, rather than producing an indefinite trauma, the HSAS' political manipulation of the known and the unknown ended up generating precisely the opposite. The public discourse on the HSAS was quickly infiltrated by comedians, fake news outlets, and bloggers, which ridiculed, satirized, and effectively deconstructed the Advisory System's colour scheme. Based on an analysis of three examples, Behnke argues that the satirical, indeed sometimes sarcastic, renditions of the HSAS colour scheme opened the discursive public space, allowed the public to address the government's implication in the constant production of fear, and ultimately aided in the overcoming of the very trauma that the HSAS meant to perpetuate. Finally, one can even claim that the US administration's decision to discontinue the HSAS and to implement a more 'informative' scheme can be traced to the effectiveness of these popular tactics of comedy and satire against the sovereign strategy of fear.

Broadening to the scope of analysis to include non-Western readings of al-Qaeda, Ali Parchami's chapter, *The Friend of My Enemy: al-Qaeda, Iran and the US* introduces the view from Iran – a country closely associated with the support of terrorism. As highly controversial actors, both al-Qaeda and Iran are identified with an extreme form of militant Islam, one which is intrinsically anti-Western in its sentiment and prone to violence in its methodology. Both entities

have frequently been portrayed as allies against the West. In the light of these assumptions, Parchami's chapter addresses two overarching issues: accusations of Iranian complicity with al-Qaeda on the one hand, and Iran's understanding of al-Qaeda on the other. It argues that due to an acute shortage of empirical data, it is not possible to link Iran to al-Qaeda with any degree of certainty. If there has been any collusion, it is impossible to determine at what level Iran may have been involved. The institutional structures of the clerical regime and its fragmented political arena make it particularly difficult for those outside Iran's ruling elite to give informed opinions about the nuances of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy. Indeed, it would seem that critics can accuse Iran of anything and find a receptive international audience for their allegations. The incendiary rhetoric of the clerical leadership, the on-going struggles between its ruling factions, its lack of transparency, its reputation for supporting terrorism, and the regime's extrajudicial activities, make it easy to believe the worst of Iran. Yet the Iranian discourse provides a markedly alternative narrative about the origins, nature and purpose of the 'Sunni network'. According to the Iranian narrative, what the Americans characterize as 'al-Qaeda' has its roots in a US-Saudi project which funded and trained Osama bin Laden and his followers in the 1980s. In the ensuing decades, the al-Qaeda movement may have become increasingly independent of its American masters and even may have been responsible for attacking US interests. Nonetheless, al-Qaeda was created as an instrument of US hegemony and it continues to serve America's interests: in the 1980s, bin Laden and his fighters were proxies in the war against the Soviet Red Army in Afghanistan whilst, today, they provide Washington with the perfect pretext to pursue its hegemonic ambitions in the Greater Middle East. Knowingly or unknowingly to al-Qaeda's leadership, the movement has become the vehicle through which the United States has finally succeeded in militarizing the Middle East.

Advancing a gendered perspective on the challenge of knowing al-Qaeda, Nadya Ali's chapter, *Terrorizing Women: Re-thinking the Female Jihad*, examines the narrative strategies through which the female terrorist/jihadist is given meaning within the Western discourse. Traditionally, Western notions of women in Muslim countries emphasized the notion of oppressed, disenfranchized and disempowered subjects with few, if any, opportunities for resistance and articulation. To the extent that the Western struggle against terrorism and its cultural preconditions addresses and seeks to change such realities, there is a sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit assumption that women in Muslim societies would welcome this War on Terror waged, in part, to liberate them from oppression. As such, the phenomenon of the female terrorist waging violent jihad poses a double conundrum: Here, a female subject emerges that not only defies oppressive and disempowering constructions, but also articulates its subjectivity in a violent struggle against the powers that are supposedly liberating it. Focusing on three case studies of women associating themselves with al-Qaeda, Ali examines whether these radical subjects are able to force a transformation of the ruling narrative, or if the latter is able to accommodate this terrorist subject within its structure of meaning. Ali's argument

that a critical examination of female jihadis disintegrates the Oriental discourse represents a serious challenge to the prevailing discourse of the War on Terror.

Notes

¹ A particularly harsh criticism of the failure to predict the events of 9/11 can be found in Kramer, M. 2001. *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America*, Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

² Derrida, J. 2003. Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides – A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida, in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror. Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, edited by G. Borradori. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 90.

³ Ignatieff, M. 2001. It's War – But it Doesn't Have to be Dirty. *The Guardian*, 1 October. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/oct/01/afghanistan.terrorism9> [accessed 15 June 2011].

⁴ It was not until 2005 that a collection of bin Laden's most important statements made between 1994 and 2004 finally became available. Whilst this collection, edited and annotated by B. Lawrence, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, London: Verso, 2005, provides one of the most useful insights into the rationale of al-Qaeda to date, it has been surprisingly under-utilized. In part, this may be due to the assumption that the phenomenon of bin Laden's global jihad is already sufficiently understood.

⁵ Hunt, K and Rygiel, K. 2007. *(En)Gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics*. Aldershot: Ashgate, xiii.

⁶ Cronin, A. 2010. How Al-Qaeda Ends. Presentation at the IV Jornadas Internacionales Sobre 'Los Finales del Terrorismo', Zaragoza, Spain, 10 November. For a more detailed discussion, see Cronin, A. 2006. How al-Qaeda Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups, *International Security* 31(1), 7–48.

⁷ Ignatieff, It's War.

⁸ Waltz, K.N. 2003. The Continuity of International Politics, in *Worlds in Collision. Terror and the Future of Global Order*, edited by Ken Booth and Tim Dunne. Palgrave: Basingstoke.

⁹ Mbembé, A. 2001. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press; Fanon, F. 1967. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth Penguin; Fanon, F. 2001. *Black Skin, White Mask*. London: Paladin.

¹⁰ de Certeau, M. 1988. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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Chapter 2

‘Here Come the Salafis’

The Framing of al-Qaeda’s Ideology within Terrorism Research

Christina Hellmich

Since the early 1990s (and until his death), Osama bin Laden – the public face and alleged leader of al-Qaeda – has made a very public effort to address what he regarded as the deterioration of Islamic principles and the many problems faced by the global community of Muslims (*umma*). In 1994, in a letter to the chief Mufti of Saudi Arabia, he decried the kingdom’s dependence on the United States, the corruption of Saudi princes and political leadership, the intrusion of Western values and the betrayal of the Palestinians. In August 1996, aggravated by the continued decline of Islamic principles and the visible suffering of Muslims in different corners of the world from Palestine and Iraq to Kashmir and Chechnya, bin Laden declared jihad against the American ‘military occupation’ of Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula. In February 1998, together with a number of his associates (also known as the World Islamic Front), he issued a religious ruling (*fatwa*) that called on every Muslim to kill Americans, notably both civilians and military personnel, in every country in which it was possible to do so, in order to liberate al-Aqsa Mosque and the Holy Mosque and to drive the US armies out of all the lands of Islam to the point where they would be defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.¹

Despite bin Laden’s relentless efforts to communicate his message –including open letters, video messages and interviews with both the Western and Arab media – and indeed despite the increasing urgency and lethality of his warnings, culminating in his declaration of war against the United States, his voice remained largely unheard. It was not until three-and-a-half years after the issuing of the by now infamous fatwa of 1998 that, on the morning of 11 September 2001, al-Qaeda demonstrated the magnitude of its threat by organising and perpetrating the deadliest terrorist attack to date. The alacrity of the Western world’s response confirmed that actions speak louder than words: it triggered, virtually overnight, the debate that all of bin Laden’s letters, speeches and interviews had failed to ignite.

Since the attacks of 11 September, few issues have been more urgently and widely debated than the ideology of al-Qaeda: the rationale that motivated such acts of violence and bloodshed in the name of Islam – and numerous interpretations have surfaced. These include suggestions that the terrorists’ actions

are irrational, potentially resulting from a variety of mental disorders; that the religious rhetoric is merely a veil for political ambition; or that the explanation lies in different theories of Islamic extremism. 'Al-Qaeda not driven by ideology' is the conclusion reached by a Pentagon intelligence team,² whilst according to Stephen Schwartz, 'Osama bin Laden and his followers belong to a puritanical variant of Islam known as Wahhabism, an extreme and intolerant Islamo-Fascist sect that became the official cult of Saudi Arabia.'³ Still others prefer to present al-Qaeda as a group of hypocrites or even fascists – embodiments of 'pure evil'. As Rohan Gunaratna put it, 'aiming to galvanize the spirit of its supporters, al-Qaeda corrupts, misrepresents or misinterprets the Koranic text.'⁴ More recently, there appears to be a growing consensus that al-Qaeda is the vanguard of 'the global Salafi-jihad, a worldwide religious revivalist movement with the goal of re-establishing past Muslim glory in a great Islamist state.'⁵ The numerous, seemingly contradictory explanations, and in particular the latest transition within the debate over the rationale at the core of al-Qaeda raise the question of not only whether there is consensus as to the essential nature of al-Qaeda's *raison d'être*, but more importantly *what kind* of consensus analysts have achieved. With this notion in mind, this chapter takes a closer look at the main explanations that have evolved regarding the ideology of al-Qaeda. In doing so, the goal is neither to identify nor to 'confirm' which is the most accurate description or explanation, but rather to examine the various discourses in their own right and to trace and analyse in more detail the framings of al-Qaeda that result and form the basis of what is officially accepted as knowledge or truth of what the group is all about.

Explaining the Ideology of al-Qaeda in the Shadow of the 'War on Terror'

A meaningful investigation into the different rationales that have sought to explain the ideology of al-Qaeda begins with a closer look at the state of the information that was available prior to 11 September and the rapid development of the literature that followed immediately thereafter. As has already been indicated above, in the 1990s, only a handful of individuals were conducting research on what was to become one of the most widely discussed security issues in the years ahead. As Magnus Ranstorp concluded in his extensive review of the terrorist studies literature during the period before 11 September, 'There was extraordinarily limited research on al-Qaeda related topics.'⁶ As surprising as it may seem with the benefit of hindsight, the spectacular destruction of the Twin Towers against a bright blue September sky took the Western world by surprise: terrorism experts, security specialists and academics alike had failed to predict an attack of such magnitude.⁷ Naturally then, the events of 11 September, at once the most spectacular act of propaganda ever carried out, instantly launched a rollercoaster of uncertainty, fear and speculation as the most obvious and pressing of questions begged to be answered: Who would do such a thing? And why? Meaningful answers, however, were nowhere to be found. Indeed, a striking feature of the early days following the attacks was the

circulation, and recirculation, of spectacular images of destruction that engrained the reality of what had literally come out of the blue into the consciousness of all those who could not escape the reach of the media. At the same time, little, if any, room was allocated to text – analysis and explanations of what had happened. Yet the prevalence of the sensational over the analytical was not an act of media propaganda or even, as some voices have claimed, the outworking of some sort of government conspiracy. Rather, the inescapable presence of those horrifying images in our newspapers and on our television screens was merely the visual evidence of a mounting confrontation of the bewildered Western world with questions to which there were no answers at that point in time. At risk of further sensationalizing the issue, 11 September could be said to be the opening of a blank page on which the biography of al-Qaeda had yet to be written.

That the circumstances in the aftermath of the attacks were so bewildering and so urgent explains why there then came a rush to fill the vacuum left by Ground Zero with answers. What ensued was a widespread suspension of critical faculties as commentators rushed headlong to generate explanations. The corollary of this was that the most attention was paid to those who shouted loudest and appeared to provide the most satisfying, if not the most sophisticated answers. Virtually overnight, journalists became the most influential commentators in the field, not because of the superior quality of their knowledge, but because their words and their analyses of the situation reached most people first. In turn, some analysts – especially those who were soon to be hailed as experts – were quoting ‘facts’ about al-Qaeda, the true nature of Islam and the meaning of jihad drawn from what they had picked up from CNN, *The New York Times* and Fox News. Certain assumptions, once created and repeated, have, over time, become entrenched as truths.

In addition to the overall lack of information regarding the rationale of the attackers, it was the nature of the actions taken on the political front – and the political climate it created – that shaped subsequent explanations. The horrors inflicted upon New York and Washington had scarcely unfolded before the United States quickly moved to declare an open-ended ‘war against terrorism.’⁸ It was arguably an uncalculated, instinctive response that would become nothing less than a global military, political, legal and ideological campaign against individuals and organizations designated as ‘terrorists,’ as well as regimes that were accused of supporting them or otherwise appeared to pose a threat to the US and its allies. In the context of this broad definition of the enemy, then US President George W. Bush soon began to talk of ‘a terrorist underworld,’ including groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Jaish-i-Mohammed, that ‘operates in remote jungles and deserts, and hides in the centers of large cities’ and is aided by regimes, including North Korea and Iraq, that seek to export terrorism and threaten America.⁹ ‘States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.’¹⁰ Potential targets of the War on Terror would soon include a wide range of Islamist groups and actors, as well as regimes that differ remarkably in their ideological constructs and political objectives, all united by the fact that they could reasonably or conveniently be accused of having links with al-Qaeda.

Although it may, at first glance, seem quite astonishing that the United States Government, with all of its intelligence resources, should lump al-Qaeda together with a range of disparate groupings such as Hamas, the ‘disputatious schoolmen of Qom,’ the Deobandi seminaries of northern Pakistan that trained the Taliban, and then, elsewhere, relate them all to secular Arab nationalist Baath Party regimes, with the benefit of hindsight it is not so surprising. Against the backdrop of an overall political climate that divided the world into ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ the US government assumed the existence of an underlying Islamist terrorist agenda and focussed on superficial similarities such as suicide attacks and aeroplane hijackings that were somehow related to the Middle East and Islam. It was, in a sense, nothing short of the creation of new Orientalist stereotypes, this time seeing the Middle East and Islam represented not by harems and veils, but by bearded suicide bombers born and raised in a geographic cradle of anti-Americanism. This new form of Orientalism has been strongly criticized by scholars who refer to it as the ‘neo-Orientalist terrorism discourse,’ taking as their reference the late Edward Said, in whose work the West’s view of the Eastern world and thought is censured for being based on preconceptions and a limited understanding of Eastern and Islamic culture.¹¹ Thus Neo-Orientalism is deeply rooted in classical Orientalist ideas such as ‘the Arab mind’ and ‘the nature of Islam,’ enabling the construction of an ‘Arab-Islamic terrorist other,’ which – in keeping with Huntington’s theory of the clash of civilizations – seeks to negate Western culture and values.¹² Dag Tuastad has identified the neo-Orientalist narrative as an instrument of ‘symbolic power’ that sustains neo-colonial interests through ‘presentations of political violence that omit political and economic interests and contexts (...) and present the violence as resulting from traits embedded in local cultures.’¹³ In this Manichean model, al-Qaeda is essentially not very different from Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad or the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF): they are, first and foremost, enemies of the US and the civilized Western world.

Particularly telling illustrations of this outlook – many of them not so much enlightening as demeaning, both to their subjects and to those involved in producing them – can be found in psychological profiling efforts that fuel the image of Islamic terrorists as ‘crazy madmen’ acting under the influence of mental disorders and deprived of any rational logic related to social, political or religious conditions. At first sight, the attribution of terrorism to some underlying mental pathology might appear to provide an immediate, scientific and acceptable explanation at a time when straightforward answers are in great demand. The logic is simple: normal, healthy people do not have an urge to kill vast numbers of other people.¹⁴ Those afflicted with some kind of severe mental illness occasionally do. On the other hand, ‘crazy’ people usually make poor leaders of complex technical operations and even worse communicators – genuine severe mental illness would in all likelihood deprive individuals of the very capacities they would need in order to become successful terrorists.¹⁵ However, the concept of ‘crazy terrorists’ has been found not just to provide easy answers by describing the behaviour of selected individuals, but also to posit a diagnosis by which to discriminate against an entire

society, bringing to mind the image of 'native culture as patient in need of Western medicine.'¹⁶ A notable proponent of this theory is Joan Lachkar, who concluded that suicide bombers suffer from borderline personality disorders brought on by 'Islamic child-rearing practices.'¹⁷ Terrorism at the hands of Islamists is thereby transformed into the terminal stage of a general Muslim malady – with al-Qaeda a particularly malignant development of the condition.

It is obvious to the critical observer, however, that the stereotyping and oversimplification inherent in this perception of extreme or pathological behaviour somehow being related to the nature of Arab-Islamic culture, whilst complementing the notion of fundamentally incompatible, geographically-bound ideals, effectively obscure the socio-political and religious diversity that must necessarily be taken into account in any cross-cultural analysis. For as long as the dust was still settling at Ground Zero, the failure of the international community fully to grasp the complexities of the situation was forgivable. As Bernhard Lewis elegantly explains, inter-civilizational contacts have often been difficult.¹⁸ Yet to continue to view the intricate dynamics, problems and prospects of an entire region within the general framework of a clash between Islam and the West is to become preoccupied with a balance sheet that tells, at best, only part of the story. The neo-Orientalist narrative can only be sustained for as long as it is removed from the local and specific. Its perception of a homogenous Islamist terrorist enemy falls apart when the nature and objectives of al-Qaeda are compared, however briefly, to those of other fundamentalist groups.¹⁹ In contrast to the territorial struggle against a specific enemy that underlies, for example, the reality of Palestinian rejectionist movements, al-Qaeda's mission is first and foremost transnational, neither limited to any specific nation-state context nor driven by the needs and aspirations of specific peoples. As Olivier Roy puts it, the adherents of al-Qaeda 'are indifferent to their own nationalities. Some have several (...) they all define themselves as Muslim internationalists and link their militancy to no particular national cause.'²⁰ In other words, they are committed to the totality of Muslim grievances, and aim for nothing less than the end of all Muslim suffering at the hands of the ultimate enemy of Islam: the US and its allies, also referred to as the Crusader-Zionist alliance. Thus both sides can in a sense be said to be engaged in the same process of stereotyping.

Further explanations of al-Qaeda's ideology can be found in frequently-encountered notions characterising its members variously as criminals, religious hypocrites or political players who calculatingly make use of religion to manipulate the sensibilities of others in order to achieve political, rather than religious goals.²¹ Rohan Gunaratna, who argues that bin Laden intentionally invokes Islamic symbolism and rhetoric to create an image of religious authority, arrives at the conclusion that in 'aiming to galvanise the spirit of its supporters, al-Qaeda corrupts, misrepresents or misinterprets the Koranic text.'²² The publication of Gunaratna's *Inside Al-Qaeda* as one of the first extensive works on al-Qaeda post 9/11 resulted in wide acceptance of this view of bin Laden and his followers as political actors whose apparent commitment to Islam is in fact a clever propaganda

tool to rally popular support and legitimize terrorism in the pursuit of purely political ends. One might note, however, that appealing to religious sensibilities is by no means unique to the case of Osama bin Laden, but rather a common feature of Muslim politics in the ongoing contest over religious and political legitimacy.²³ An important point that is easily overlooked – and which will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapter – is that both bin Laden and his followers perceive of themselves as true believers and see no contradiction between their religious views and political actions.

Other analysts choose to paint Islamic terrorists as religious hypocrites who speak the language of Islam with conviction, yet still resort to making their point with the bomb, whilst some commentators deny the absence of any kind of underlying ideology altogether. In 2003, a Pentagon Intelligence team eventually concluded: ‘al-Qaeda not driven by ideology.’²⁴ Such a logic is in many ways as apparently convenient and as actually deceptive as the ‘crazy-madmen’ hypothesis, for both imply the same solution: capture or destroy the misguided few and the problem goes away. Yet the lack of final success in the war against terrorism might be an indication that this explanatory model is not entirely accurate. It seems more likely that the perpetrators of September 11 who so willingly went to their own deaths had grander motives for doing so than are generally available to rational, political actors. Indeed, even a glance at anthropological research quickly reveals that religious fundamentalists throughout the world, including the followers of al-Qaeda, consider themselves to belong to a strictly defined community of true believers, guided by the will of God and eligible for divine rewards for their obedience.²⁵

Towards an ‘Islamic’ Explanation of al-Qaeda: The Wahhabi Debate

Acknowledging the existence of a greater source of meaning than ‘this-worldly incentives’ to explain the ideology of al-Qaeda, researchers like Stephen Schwartz argue that ‘Osama bin Laden and his followers belong to a puritanical variant of Islam known as Wahhabism, an extreme and intolerant Islamo-Fascist sect that became the official cult of Saudi Arabia.’²⁶ This view typifies Wahhabism as an extremist and latently dangerous, monolithic school of thought. Such an assumption is readily supported by an initial online-search of the term ‘Wahhabism,’ which generates hundreds of links – mainly to anti-Wahhabism sites. However, the *Encyclopedia of Islam* – a far more authoritative source on this matter – indicates that the term Wahhabism is in fact an outsider’s designation for a religious movement within Islam, founded by the eighteenth-century Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab. Its followers, according to the *Encyclopedia*, regard themselves as Sunnis, follow the school of Ibn Taymiyya and advocate a strict literalism in which the Qur’an is the primary source of legitimacy. The Wahhabi manifesto is simple: ridding Islam of all innovations (*bida’*) later than the third century of Islam. It also confirms that Wahhabis went on uncompromising campaigns against Sufis

and Shiites, labelling those who held differing views heretics and apostates and effectively legitimizing the use of violence against them.²⁷

This sanctioned use of violence against other Muslims tends to be the focus of those who link Wahhabism to al-Qaeda, but this appears somewhat short-sighted, as it ignores fundamental differences between the two ideologies as well as the complex development of Wahhabism during the centuries following its genesis. At the most basic level, one can but wonder to what extent Muhammad ibn Abd' al-Wahhab, whose strong beliefs about *tawhid* led him to assert that 'the overwhelming majority of Muslims (...) had fallen into a state of religious ignorance no better than that of the *djahiliyya*,²⁸ would have embraced the comparatively tolerant rhetoric of Pan-Islam proclaimed by Osama bin Laden who seeks to reclaim the whole of the *umma* from foreign oppression, regardless of religious differences that are bound to exist.²⁹ Furthermore, despite its legacy of violent campaigns against all those who did not share its views, Wahhabism has evolved from its traditional, fundamentalist beginnings, and its standards have moderated to a certain degree over the past century. Whilst Osama bin Laden and other Islamic fundamentalists may be inspired by the violent tradition and spirit espoused by Muhammad ibn Abd' al-Wahhab, it is equally true that Wahhabi sheikhs in Saudi Arabia have unequivocally stated that suicide bombings are un-Islamic.³⁰ These observations, brief as they may be, give rise to an important question: How much is really known about the origins and subsequent development of Wahhabi thought by those who claim that it is essential to al-Qaeda's vision?³¹ How accurate, as a matter of fact, is our reading of Islamic history?

To illustrate this point, it is helpful to return to the debate around the influence of Ibn Taymiyya, whose supposedly radical interpretations of Islam not only inspired Abd' al-Wahhab but also the modern Islamic fundamentalists, including Osama bin Laden. The arguments are readily available: Delong-Bas admonishes Ibn Taymiyya for 'his espousal of the division of the world into two absolute and mutually exclusive spheres – the land of Islam (*dar al Islam*) and the land of unbelief (*dar al-kufr*), which for him described both a status (Muslim or unbeliever) and a necessarily hostile relationship between the two.'³² According to Bernhard Haykel, 'Ibn Taymiyya's importance lies in that he was willing to hereticise fellow Muslims who did not share his views, and, more important, he declared permissible war against Muslim rulers who did not apply the Shari'ah.'³³ Taking this argument one step further, Milson argues that 'according to Ibn Taymiyya, a Muslim ruler who commits grave sins or applies alien laws is not better than an apostate (*murtadd*) and should be put to death. Hence waging jihad against such rulers is a religious duty.'³⁴ Following the same logic, Guy Sorman concludes that Ibn Taymiyya 'inaugurated a theological and political revolution: there is no fundamentalist Islamic movement that does not refer back to it.'³⁵

In contrast to what seems to have become popular knowledge about the origins of Wahhabism, Yahya Michot presents a much more balanced perspective in his careful and unemotional reading of Ibn Taymiyya's fatwa of Mardin, from which this debate originates, and his subsequent comparison of the ways in which it was

interpreted by, amongst others, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salam Faraj and Shaykh ‘Abd Allah Yusuf ‘Azzam.³⁶ Indeed, Michot’s analysis serves as an important reminder that a present-day reading of Ibn Taymiyya needs to be disciplined by the historical context in which he operated. In doing just that, Michot brings to life a scholar who was far from the arch-radical that many analysts and commentators would like him to have been. Moreover, it also becomes clear that the modern authors, whose interpretations of Ibn Taymiyya’s fatwa of Mardin Michot proceeds to examine, ‘commit the sin of (at least) anachronism in giving modern connotations to the words of Ibn Taymiyya or, more precisely, in tying their version of Ibn Taymiyya to modern circumstances.’³⁷

If one considers the possibility that Ibn Taymyya was not the origin of radical Islamic thought, then the question that immediately follows is this: When, and with whom, did it begin?³⁸ The most obvious suspect is of course Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wahhab.³⁹ Once again, however, on closer examination, it appears that despite the works of Henri Laoust, Thomas Michel and Bashier N. Nafi, a systematic historic inquiry into the development of Islamic thought during the centuries prior to the emergence of Muhammad ibn Abd’ al-Wahhab, and its progress thereafter, remains a task yet to be accomplished.⁴⁰ With all of this said, the answer to whether the ideology of al-Qaeda originates from ‘a puritanical variant of Islam known as Wahhabism’ can be little more than a definite ‘maybe’. In the development of the debate surrounding the ideology of al-Qaeda, however, the Wahhabi theory was soon to become part of a theory that achieved much wider recognition.

Al-Qaeda: ‘The Vanguard of the Global Salafi-jihad’

Against this background, some consensus eventually emerged within the field of terrorism studies that al-Qaeda is the vanguard of ‘the global Salafi-jihad.’⁴¹ It is a term that is widely used to depict the ideology of al-Qaeda, giving the impression of representing an unambiguous school of thought within the Islamic tradition. Whilst the term is frequently used to refer to the nature of al-Qaeda’s ideology, it is not clear what it really means other than the vague notion that the ideology is of a particularly radical kind, and hence the label is something of a gloss over concepts that have not been adequately explored, rather than a distinctive appellation for a phenomenon which has been clearly and reliably identified.

Although it is difficult to locate the first usage of the term, Marc Sageman’s book *Understanding Terror Networks* is a particularly frequently-cited source that allegedly offers insights into the Salafi-jihad. Sageman views al-Qaeda as ‘a worldwide religious revivalist movement with the goal of re-establishing past Muslim glory in a great Islamist state stretching from Morocco to the Philippines, eliminating present national boundaries. It preaches *salafiyyah* (from *salaf*, Arabic for ‘ancient one’, referring to the companions of the Prophet Muhammed), the restoration of authentic Islam, and advocates a strategy of violent jihad, resulting in an explosion of terror to wipe out what it regards as local heresy. The global

version of this movement advocates the defeat of the Western powers that prevent the establishment of a true Islamist state.⁷⁴² To further emphasise the threat, Sageman goes on to state that the West is confronted with a large movement 'which includes many other terrorist groups that collaborate in their operations and share a large support base.'⁷⁴³ Sageman does not, however, proceed to name these other terrorist organizations, nor does he give any details of the sources from which he has obtained his information. The remainder of his examination of the 'origins of the jihad' provides no further insights of any value, nor does it include a working definition of the 'Salafi phenomenon.' Sageman maintains that Muhammad ibn Abd' al-Wahhab, who 'based many of his Qur'anic interpretations on the fatwas of Ibn Taymiyya,' had a critical influence on the development of radical Islamist thought that underlies the ideology of al-Qaeda.⁷⁴⁴ Unfortunately, there is no reference to particular fatwas that might illustrate this. However, the subsequent description of the circumstances that surrounded the incident, namely during 'one of the most disruptive periods of Muslim history – the conquest of Muslim lands by the Mongols (...) when the question was put to Ibn Taymiyya whether it was legitimate for Muslims to declare a jihad against other Muslims' gives reason to think that Sageman is referring to the fatwa of Mardin discussed in the previous section. His conclusion that 'the Mongols were not real Muslims (...) but apostates who should be punished with death according to the Sharia (and) that it was the right, indeed the duty, of Muslims to wage jihad against them' is much in line with the views of other contemporary scholars previously mentioned.⁷⁴⁵ Yet the uncomfortable question remains: Does a statement become truth because it has been said so many times? More important, however, is the conclusion one comes to even after a thorough reading of Sageman's first chapter that the idea of the 'global Salafi-jihad' – which for many seems to have become the new truth about the ideology of al-Qaeda – remains vague at best.

A look at Wiktorowicz's 'Anatomy of the Salafi movement' promises some clarification of this issue. Wiktorowicz states that 'the Salafi movement (often referred to as the Wahhabis) represents a diverse community' that 'includes such diverse figures as Osama bin Laden and the Mufti of Saudi Arabia and reflects a broad array of positions regarding issues related to politics and violence.'⁷⁴⁶ In spite of numerous differences, however, 'Salafis are united by a common religious creed,' which revolves around strict adherence to the concept of *tawhid* (the oneness of God) and ardent rejection of a role for human reason, logic, and desire.⁷⁴⁷ More specifically, 'Salafis believe that by strictly following the rules and guidance in the Qur'an and Sunna (path or example of the Prophet Muhammad) they eliminate the biases of human subjectivity and self-interest, thereby allowing them to identify the singular truth of God's commands.'⁷⁴⁸ From this perspective, there is only one legitimate religious interpretation, in which there is no place for Islamic pluralism. In his subsequent discussion, Wiktorowicz divides the diversity of thought within the Salafi movement into three main categories: the purists, the politicians and the jihadists. At first sight, this categorization seems to offer a means by which to conceptualize the diversity within a movement that has

evolved greatly since its inception. However, Wiktorowicz is not alone in his quest to define the Salafi movement. Elsewhere, we read about ‘neo-traditional Salafis,’ ‘conservative reformists,’ and ‘radical secularists,’ to name but a few.⁴⁹ Whilst a thorough comparison of these different approaches would be beyond the scope of this book, this observation raises a couple of interesting questions: to what extent is there any kind of consensus on the Salafi-discourse? And, therefore, what exactly is meant by the terms ‘Salafi’ and ‘Salafism’?

Again the *Encyclopedia of Islam* describes a very complex, often contradictory, process of development of Salafi thought. If nothing else, ‘the issue of who is considered a member of the *salaf* is a controversial one.’⁵⁰ In literary terms, the word *salafiyah* is derived from the Arabic root *salaf*, which means ‘to proceed.’ Whilst the Qur’an uses *salaf* to refer to the past, according to Arabic lexicons, the *salaf* are the virtuous forefathers (*al-salaf al-salih*), where the *salafi* is the one who draws on the Qur’an and the *sunnah* as the only sources for religious rulings. Although most Muslim scholars agree that the *salaf* comprise the first three generations of Muslims, which spans three centuries and include the companions of the Prophet, their followers, *al-Tabi’in*, and the followers of their followers, *Tabi’ al-Tabi’i*, neither the literal nor the chronological definition is sufficient to explain the term fully. The *Encyclopedia* specifically states that the ‘*salaf* are not confined to a specific group nor to a certain era.’⁵¹ Rather, prominent scholars and independent figures of later times are considered members of the *salaf*, including Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, Muhammad ibn Abd’ al-Wahhab, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad ‘Abduh and others. Here it deserves to be mentioned that the views of even the earliest generations of Muslims were far from homogeneous, and that the ideological components of the Salafiyah further changed over time and in response to the myriad of challenges the Muslim community faced as its dedication to reform and revival persisted.⁵² Thus the widespread assumption that the Salafijihadist discourse is a well-defined, monolithic school of thought is very much open to debate, as is the fashion in which Salafism is portrayed, in the literature on terrorism in general, and with regard to the ideology of al-Qaeda in particular.⁵³

To emphasise this point, it is useful to investigate the frequently encountered argument that Salafis shun human reasoning and desire just a little bit further – whilst keeping in mind that interpretation is necessarily part of all *tafsir* (exegesis of the Qur’an). At first sight, the *Encyclopedia of Islam* confirms that Ahmad ibn Hanbal, for example, advocated the primacy of the revealed text over reason, although he saw no contradiction between reason and scripture.⁵⁴ It is further confirmed that the modern Salafiyah, as established by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad ‘Abduh, share the belief that the Qur’an is the uncreated word of God – i.e. that it is divinely inspired, as opposed to simply being written by men – and rejected the interpretation of its verses. They equally considered revelation and reason to be in full consonance but, whenever there seemed to be a contradiction between the two, they employed reasoning to interpret the text.⁵⁵ Does that mean that human reason is permissible under certain circumstances?

If so, what are these circumstances? Is the kind of subjectivity that inevitably accompanies human contemplations of divine concepts admissible? And finally, if only the divine can truly speak for the divine, who has the right to speak for the 'true Islam'?

At this point it is interesting to return once more to Sageman's argument which, amongst others, notes that '[Egyptian author and Islamist] Sayyid Qutb's influence on the Salafi-jihad was crucial.'⁵⁶ Before developing this thought any further, one must first establish by what definition Qutb might be said to be a Salafi. The first link of the aforementioned internet search reveals that 'most Salafis reject what they call Qutbism as a deviation from true Salafism.'⁵⁷ The article, however, does not state who these 'Salafis' are nor where they express such opinions, nor indeed does it provide a greater sense of objectivity by defining the 'true Salafism' of Qutb's critics. Wiktorowicz's argument that Salafis reject any role of human reason and interpretation leaves Sageman's attempt to connect Qutb and al-Qaeda with Salafism looking even more slender: Simultaneous – and supposedly mutually exclusive – denial of reason and demonstration of cognitive adaptation of the Qur'anic text to reality are evident, for example, in Sayyid Qutb's well-known political interpretation of the Qur'an, *Fi zizlal al-Qur'an* (In the Shade of the Qur'an). Whilst a certain level of interpretation, as mentioned before, is common to all *tafsir*, in reading Qutb's commentary, one is continually struck by the interplay between his own ideas and the Qur'anic text, showing that he did not find the truth in the script itself but rather in what he believed to be its meaning.⁵⁸

The same process is evinced when bin Laden calls upon fellow Muslims to wage jihad against the enemies of the Islam and envisions the creation of something that resembles the modern idea of an Islamic state: he has transferred the words of the holy text into the current political situation and interpreted their meaning within this novel context. Bin Laden constructs his idea of Islam along the lines of an alternative interpretation which overcomes the ideological rifts within Islam and places the supposed community of faith (*umma*) well above individual states and governments and outside the influence of all that is un-Islamic. What he lacks in terms of coherent planning as to how this community of faith is to be organized in practice, he makes up for in fervour, the logic of which can be summarized as follows: First, we need to overcome the enemies of Islam, namely the Zionist-Crusader invasion, and then everything else will naturally, or maybe by divine intervention, fall into place. With this rationale, bin Laden falls short of other Pan-Islamists who have expressed their visions of Islam in significantly more concrete terms as to how the community of the believers is to be structured and governed.⁵⁹ As has become clear, however, in the previous discussion of al-Qaeda's existence as an organization, it is in its ideology that its real strength lies. In motivating individuals to pursue the physical struggle rather than engaging in nation-building, a focus on ideas is of particular importance. Beyond its relative simplicity, bin Laden's vision is, above all else, idealistic, and it is arguable that this kind of idealism goes to the very heart of the issue of Muslim solidarity, and hence is hugely appealing to those who sympathize with Bin Laden and al-Qaeda. As such,

a meaningful way to evaluate the ideological origins and broader appeal of al-Qaeda would be to place it in the larger context of the emergence of Pan-Islam, a topic which will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

The validity of this alternative approach is further supported when the label 'Salafi' is applied to bin Laden. By what definition does bin Laden become a Salafi? Is it because of his denial of the validity of human reasoning in interpreting Islamic scripture, if that is a legitimate criterion, even though he effectively flies in the face of this prohibition by applying his own interpretation to the scriptures when advancing his argument? Is it because of his proclaimed effort and intention to return to the fundamental principles (*ususl*) of Islam? Or rather, does this categorization result from the fact that he, much like other Islamic fundamentalists, perceives of himself as a true believer – or Salafi – strictly following the divine guidance of the Prophet and retrieving Islam's fundamental basics, whilst seemingly unaware of the ongoing process of his own interpretation? If for any, or all, of these reasons bin Laden and his supporters are classified as Salafi-jihadists, then maybe the more appropriate question to ask is, 'Who is not a 'modern' Salafi?'

Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter either to explore the diversity of the Salafi movement or to track the development of Wahhabism in full, it is worth noting that it is not rewarding to throw out the concept of Islamic fragmentation with the Orientalist bathwater. The perception that the Salafi discourse is a homogenous unit is challenged by the existence of a variety of strands of thought and differing interpretations, especially at a time of ongoing fragmentation of religious authority 'whereby the meaning of scripture no longer needs to be interpreted by a religious establishment but, rather, lies in the eyes of the beholder.'⁶⁰ The observation underlying this argument is that the Muslim world has been isolated from neither the processes of modernization nor the advent of mass education which, amongst other factors, have both influenced and permitted the development of new political societies, inequalities, identities and opportunities. Whilst many Muslims would vehemently insist that the long-standing development of Islamic jurisprudence and Qur'anic exegesis provides definitive guidance to the believer, 'this tradition now confronts the proliferation of modern-educated individuals, who have direct access to the basic religious texts and question why they should automatically defer to the religious class.'⁶¹ As a result of this ongoing development, it has become increasingly difficult to say what is Islamic and what is not. And it is both this shifting of goal-posts and the ease with which individuals can presume to invoke and defend Muslim tradition that have allowed individuals such as Osama bin Laden to claim to speak on behalf of Islam. But does this, in turn, mean that every Muslim who strives on behalf of the actual meaning of Islam can be said to be a Salafi?⁶² Hassan al-Turabi, the Sorbonne-educated leader of the Muslim Brothers in Sudan, who exclaimed that 'because all knowledge is divine and religious, a chemist, an economist or a jurist are all '*ulama*', would claim that this is so. In the words of James Piscatori, 'ideas concerning issues from popular participation to social justice are far from stagnant, and Qur'anic meanings are nothing if not ambiguous.'⁶³ In other words,

the 'Salafi-jihadist' discourse that seems to have become the underlying ideology of al-Qaeda lacks a definitional basis and remains vague at best. Although one might regard it as a convenient label for radical Islamists in the broadest of terms, such a designation poses the problem of generalization and the lumping together of a variety of movements with different geo-specific goals and agendas by focussing exclusively on the violent means through which these different ends are to be achieved. As such, it does not seem to be particularly rewarding to use this term as a means to explaining the logic that underlies al-Qaeda's global jihad.

Conclusion: Why the *Salafis* Stayed – or – the Functionality of the Discourse

As the discussion in this chapter has shown, existing inquiries into the ideology of al-Qaeda apparently originated from a state of crisis and were carried out in a research climate gripped by urgency in the face of sudden turmoil on the security and political scene. Whether characterising al-Qaeda's adherents as madmen, hypocrites, religious fanatics, Wahhabis of the 21st century or Salafi-jihadists, what these different assessments have in common is what one might call an 'outside-in' approach to analysis, which concentrates on al-Qaeda's outward appearance and makes use of existing paradigms to attempt to explain the phenomena under investigation. By virtue of their focus on the use of violence, terrorism analysts have turned to explanatory models such as Wahhabism or the Salafi-jihadist discourse, which, as the previous discussion has shown, are concepts that are in themselves nothing if not complex and subject to much controversy – and which are by no means the straightforward, monolithic schools of thought some would like them to be. Thus it would appear that much of the analysis has deviated from the established procedures of inquiry and created rather thin and shallow labels that give the illusion of answers but ultimately offer very little by way of meaningful commentary or description. The risk of proceeding in such a manner is not only a misreading of the rich history and development of Islamic thought, but also – more importantly – a misinterpretation of the very issue under investigation. Whilst the Salafi-jihadi label might adequately capture the violent means that are pursued, it offers no insight into the rationale, goals and justification, as well as the wider appeal of the al-Qaeda's global jihad.

Given the inadequacies of these explanations, why are they still so popular? Their effectiveness has to be explained not in terms of their validity but in terms of their functionality and the ease with which they are slipped into public discourse. The fixation on the Salafi discourse creates a sense of distance, by which al-Qaeda is placed both temporally and spatially at some remove from the mainstream of human affairs and is hence de-politicized. The terrorist act is seen as an expression of a pre-modern culture rather than of a highly political problem, allowing those who have the privilege of writing history effectively to silence the other side and to maintain the prerogative of the West to decide what counts as political, and especially what constitutes either a legitimate political grievance or a legitimate

method of asserting one's rights. Against this consistent attempt to deny bin Laden any contemporary relevance, some analysts have at least acknowledged that he represents contemporary political grievances. Yet, even after his death, bin Laden remains an enigma. The many, often conflicting descriptions of the former chief of al-Qaeda, just like explanations of the organisation's ideology, are to a far greater extent reflections of our own self-understanding in the West rather than a meaningful engagement with the 'other'.

Notes

¹ For a detailed commentary on bin Laden's messages, see Lawrence, B. 2005. *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, London: Verso.

² No author. 2003. Finding of a Pentagon intelligence team. *The Washington Times*, 5 June. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2003/jun/05/20030605-011655-2131r/>.

³ Schwartz, S. 2002. *The Two Faces of Islam*. New York: Random House Inc., 1.

⁴ Gunaratna, R. 2002. *Inside al-Qaeda*. New York: Columbia University Press, 14.

⁵ Sageman, M. 2004. *Understanding Terror Networks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1.

⁶ Ranstorp, M. 2008. Mapping Terrorism Studies After 9/11: An Academic Field of Old Problems and New Prospects, in *Critical Terrorism Studies: Framing a New Research Agenda*, edited by R. Jackson, M. Breen Smyth and J. Gunning. London: Routledge, 23. For a similar assessment of the field, see Ranstorp, M. 2007. *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the art, gaps and future directions*. London: Routledge.

⁷ A particularly harsh criticism of the failure to predict the events of 9/11 can be found in Kramer, M. 2001. *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America*. Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

⁸ Bush, G.W. 2001. Radio Address of the President to the Nation. 15 September. [Online]. Available at: <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010915.html>.

⁹ Bush, G.W. 2002. State of the Union Address. 29 January. [Online]. Available at: <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For a discussion of the neo-Orientalist discourse on terrorism see Tuastad, D. 2003. Neo-Orientalism and the New Barbarism Thesis: Aspects of Symbolic Violence in the Middle East Conflict(s). *Third World Quarterly* 24(4), 591–599. A compelling summary of this logic is also found in Strindberg, A. and Wörn, M. 2005. Realities of Resistance: Hizballah, the Palestinian Rejectionist and Al-Qa'ida Compared. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34(3), 23–41.

¹² For an overview and critique of this hypothesis see Brannan, D.W., Esler, P.F., and Strindberg, N.T.A. 2001. Talking to Terrorists: Towards an Independent Analytical Framework of Sub-State Activism. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 24(1), 3–24.

¹³ Tuastad, Neo-Orientalism and the New Barbarism, 595. For Tuastad, 'symbolic power' is not only the power to create versions of reality, but also the means of producing distorted images.

- ¹⁴ Similarly, see Falkenrath, R.A., Newman, R.D., and Thayer, B.A. 1999. *America's Achilles Heel*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, p. 61.
- ¹⁵ For a similar conclusion, see Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 80–83.
- ¹⁶ Strindberg and Wörn, *Realities of Resistance*, 25.
- ¹⁷ Lachkar, J. 2002. The Psychological Make-up of a Suicide-Bomber. *Journal of Psychohistory* 29(4), 349–367. For attributions to other pathologies see for example Rosenberger, J. 2003. Discerning the Behaviour of the Suicide Bomber. *Journal of Religion and Health* 42(1), 13–20; or Israeli, R. 1997. Islamikaze and their Significance. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9(3), 96–121; Post, J. 1990. Terrorist psycho-logic: Terrorist behaviour as a product of psychological forces, in *Origins of Terrorism*, edited by W. Reich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; or Cleckley, H. 1941. *The Mask of Sanity*. New York: C.V. Mosby.
- ¹⁸ Lewis, B. 2002. *What went wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*, New York: Oxford University Press. Scholars like Lewis, Fouad Ajami or Barry Rubin are frequently accused of defining the Middle East according to Western imaginations that underpin the logic of the ongoing war against terrorism. See for example Rubin, B.M. 2003. *The Tragedy of the Middle East*. New Heaven: Yale University Press; Ajami, F. 2003. Iraq and the Arab's Future, *Foreign Affairs* 82(1), 2–28.
- ¹⁹ For a comparison of Hamas, Hizballah and al-Qaeda, see Strindberg and Wörn, *Realities of Resistance*. However, the authors, whilst correctly identifying territorial differences, eventually proceed to place the ideological underpinning al-Qaeda in Wahhabi theology.
- ²⁰ Roy, O. 1998. Fundamentalists without a common cause. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 2 October. [Online]. Available at: <http://mondediplo.com/1998/10/04afghan>.
- ²¹ See for example Wedgwood, R. and Roth, K. 2004. Combatants or Criminals? How Washington Should Handle Terrorists, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/59902/ruth-wedgwood-kenneth-roth/combatants-or-criminals-how-washington-should-handle-terrorists>. For an extended discussion on the idea of terrorists as rational decision makers, see Crenshaw, M. 1990. The logic of terrorism: Terrorist behaviour as a product of strategic choice, in *Origins of Terrorism*, edited by W. Reich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ²² Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda*, p. 14.
- ²³ For an authoritative discussion of the dynamics of Muslim Politics, see Eickelman, D. and Piscatori, J. 1996. *Muslim Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- ²⁴ No author, 'Al-Qaeda not driven by Ideology'.
- ²⁵ See for example, Beeman, W.O. 2001. Fighting the good fight: fundamentalism and religious revival, in J. MacClancy, *Anthropology for the Real World*. Chicago: Chicago University Press; or Luhmann, N. 1977. *Funktion der Religion*. Frankfurt: Piper Verlag.
- ²⁶ Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam*, 1. Other supporters of the Wahhabi-hypothesis include: Allen, Ch. 2006. *God's Terrorists: The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad*. New York: Dacapo Press; Strindberg and Wörn, 'Realities of Resistance'; Gause, G. 2006. Wahhabism, bin Ladenism and the Saudi-Arabia Dilemma. Lecture delivered 25 May, at UCLA. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=25057>; or Schwartz, S. 2004. Wahhabism and Al-Qaeda in Bosnia Herzegovina. *Terrorism Monitor* 2(20).
- ²⁷ 'Wahhabiyya' in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960, 40.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

²⁹ Hellmich, Ch. 2005. Al-Qaeda—terrorists, hypocrites and fundamentalists? The view from within. *Third World Quarterly* 26(1), 39–54.

³⁰ See also Azzam, M. 2003. Al-Qaeda: the misunderstood Wahhabi connection and the ideology of violence. *The Royal Institute of International Affairs Briefing Paper* No. 1, February.

³¹ For an alternative view, see Natana DeLong-Bas's extensive study of Wahhabism's founding father, which rejects the conventional idea that the movement is a radical departure from the mainstream of Islam. DeLong-Bas, N. 2004. *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*. London: I.B. Tauris.

³² Ibid., 248.

³³ Haykel, B. 2001. Radical Salafism: Osama's Ideology. *Dawn*. [Online]. Available at: www.muslim-canada.org/binladindawn.html.

³⁴ Milson, M. 2004. Reform vs. Islamism in the Arab world today. *Special Report* 34, 15 September. The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI). Available at www.memri.org/bin/articles/cgi?Page/archivesArea/srIDSR3404.

³⁵ Sorman, G. 2003. *Les enfants de Rifaa: musulmans et modernes*, Paris: Fayard, 62.

³⁶ Michot, Y. 2004. *Mardin: Hégire, fuite du péché et 'demeure de l'Islam*. Beyrouth: Albouraq, 2004.

³⁷ Piscatori, J. 2004. Preface, in Michot, *Mardin*, xiv.

³⁸ See also Michot, *Mardin*, 130.

³⁹ See for example Benjamin, D. and Simon, S. 2002. *The Age of Sacred Terror*, New York, Random House; Laoust, H. 1939. *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taôkâi-d-Dâin Aôhmad b. Taimâiyya, canoniste ôhanbalite, né à Harrâan en 661/1262, mort à Damas en 728/1328*, Le Caire, Impr. de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale; Jansen, J. 2004. *De radicaal-islamistische ideologie: van Ibn Taymiyya tot Osama ben Laden*, Speech, 3. February, Utrecht: Universiteit Utrecht, Faculteit de Letteren, 2004; Zeidan, D. 2001. The Islamic Fundamentalist View of Life as a Perennial Battle. *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 5(4), 251–69.

⁴⁰ Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques* and 'L'influence d'Ibn Taymiyya', in *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*, edited by A. Welch and P. Cachia. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 15–33; Michel, T. 1985a. 'Ibn Taymiyya, Islamic Reformer,' *Studia Missionalia* 34, 213–232; Michel, T. 1985b. *Reformateurs religieux, Christianisme et les autres religions*. Rome: Gregorian University Press, 213–232; Nafi, B.M. 2002a. Abu al-Thanna al-Alusi: an Alim, Ottoman Mufti and Exegete of the Qur'an. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34(2), 465–494; Nafi, B.M. 2002b. Tasawuf and Reform in Pre-Modern Islamic Culture: in search of Ibrahim al-Kurani. *Die Welt des Islams* 42(3), 307–355.

⁴¹ Wiktorowicz, Q. 2006. Anatomy of the Salafi Movement. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, 207–239; Strindberg, A. 2006. The Enemy of my Enemy. *The American Conservative* 5, 11 September; von Knop, K. 2007. The Female Jihad: Al-Qaeda's Women. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, 397–314; Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Haykel, 'Radical Salafism: Osama's Ideology'; Wiktorowicz, Q. and Kaltner, J. (2003). Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda's Justification for September 11. *Middle East Policy Council Journal* X(2), 76–92; Cozzens, J. and Conway, I. 2006. The 2005 Los Angeles Plot: the new face of Jihad in the US. *Terrorism Monitor* 4(2). [Online]. Available at: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=657.

⁴² Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 1.

⁴³ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁶ Wiktorowicz 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', 207.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 207.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 207.

⁴⁹ For an extensive discussion of the variety within Salafism, see Meijer, R. 2009. *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. London: Hurst and Company. See also Duderija, A. 2006. Islamic Groups and Their Worldviews and Identities: Neo-Traditional Salafis and Progressive Muslims. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.understanding-islam.com/related/text.asp?type=rarticle&raid=442>.

⁵⁰ 'Salafiyah' in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960, 463.

⁵¹ Ibid., 463.

⁵² Ibid., 463.

⁵³ See for example Cozzens, J.B. 2006. Identifying entry points of action in counter radicalization – Countering Salafi-jihadi ideology through development initiatives. *DIIS Working Paper*, No. 2006/6, Copenhagen: Danish Institute of International Studies; Wiktorowicz, Q. 2001. The new global threat: transnational Salafis and jihad. *Middle East Policy Council* 8(4), 18–38; or Haykel, 'Radical Salafism: Osama's Ideology'.

⁵⁴ 'Salafiyah', *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 463.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 465.

⁵⁶ Sageman *Understanding Terror Networks*, 9.

⁵⁷ 'Salafism and Qutbism', accessed 12 February 2007 at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wahhabi>

⁵⁸ Qutb, S. 1979. *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (In the Shade of the Qur'an), Translated by M.A. Salahi and A.A. Shamis. London: MWH London Publishers. An interesting discussion of Qutb's interpretation can be found in Nettler, R. 1996. Guidelines for the Islamic Community: Sayyid Qutb's Political Interpretation. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1(2), 183–196.

⁵⁹ For a detailed discussion of the history of Pan-Islam, see Landau, J.M. 1994. *The Politics of Pan-Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁶⁰ Piscatori, J. 2002. The Turmoil Within. *Foreign Affairs*, May/June. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/2002/the-turmoil-within.html>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Hassan al-Turabi quoted in Eickelman, D. and Piscatori, J. 1996. *Muslim Politics*, 43.

⁶³ Piscatori, J. 2000. Islam, Islamists and the Electoral Principle in the Middle East. *ISIM Papers*, Leiden: ISIM, 46.

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Chapter 3

Anxieties of Global Empire: Politics of Visibility Epistemologies and ‘Terror’

Anna M. Agathangelou

‘The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.’¹

A few weeks after the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City, Mary Gordon expressed the anxiety of Americans at the unexpected disruption of their world when she wrote in *New York Times* that ‘to have an enemy with no name and therefore no face, even worse, a name and face that can only be guessed at, is the stuff of nightmare.’² The US administration quickly sought to give a name and face to this enemy, a reaction which leads me to ponder the 9/11 production of discourses and images about ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorists,’ their circulation and reception, and their negotiation of capital’s imperialist practices.

Right after 9/11, the state, organizations, and independent citizens produced cartoons, images, and films that made terrorism legible. While much of the imagery is fictive, it is angst-ridden and gestures to tensions between slavery and colonization. Even as they transcend racial, gender, and sexual embodiments, the images conceptualize the impossible terms of subjectivity and slavery. More specifically, the slave is a *non-legible problem*, yet also the vital material (and not just an imaginary) that coalesces conflict between the terrorist and the non-terrorist. I argue that the slave, as a structurally impossible subject, generates fantastical anxieties: the biggest fear is the slave relation which can expose at any time a terror relation, catapulting us into anarchy. As Suarez puts it, this ‘imaginative production is at once situated within a particular moment without being wholly determined by it: it is catachrestic by nature.’³

In this chapter, I examine popular images produced right after 9/11 to expose this ‘catachrestic nature’ or what I call the onto-slave-visibility—a signifying site that expresses terror and terrorism beyond the frames established by dominant imperial and sovereign state powers. I employ an insurgent postcolonial and materialist critique to read the visualized terror associated with al-Qaeda and its leader bin Laden. Following Mondzain’s ‘empire of the gaze and vision,’⁴ I argue that global empires and contemporary dominant regimes of visibility are both mutually constitutive and disrupted within. I posit that a ‘postcolonial [reading] bears a silent but insistent question mark, serving as an inquiry rather than a description, an evaluative entry point rather than a conclusion.’⁵ It ‘attempts to identify and to deconstruct the universalizing Eurocentric discourses of colonialism, nationalism,

and modernity through challenging universalist narratives of history, critiquing the form of the nation, and interrogating the relationship between power and knowledge.⁶ An insurgent practice, this reading springs out of the tensions in a slave and colonial social body, yet points to a 'percepticide' which disenables those methods whose primary goal is killing the vital component of lived material worlds that are implied in dominant images. It engages and extends theorizations of visibility—the contingent and ephemeral structures of desire, difference, history, lived experience, and memory—to show the tensions between slavery and colonial projects in the present. It enunciates an 'onto-slave visibility' that consistently mobilizes that which is profoundly feared and violently expunged, but not explicitly visible. The chapter, finally, intervenes in visibility debates, critiquing a binary colonialist ontology that severs the colonial from slavery; it articulates a supple analytic for understanding how visual production generates meaning through lived experience.

Of course, such a foothold in onto-politico-economic visibility cannot proceed without argumentative construction. More concretely, I articulate visibility as a contestation site of global power. Its critical reading anew sheds light on the violence and also on intellectual and political conceptualizations more commonly excluded from this praxical conversation. Methodologically, I draw on dominant images circulating on the internet and in major magazines to show how bin Laden is constituted as a terrorist. I argue that world terror responds to the dominant episteme expressed in the framing and content of a story. Drawing on critical postcolonial and materialist frameworks that emphasize reading all available texts and sites, I show how this mode of reading points to the kinds of positing featured in dominant productions of visibility, ultimately leading us to the encounter with a universal political economy of power that claims to be universal but not truly global.⁷ Further, I read bin Laden as a gesture symptomatic of the tensions that emerge out of histories and practices of violence linked to the Europeanization of the world. Activities of insurrection are, I argue, processes of de-Europeanization that problematize empire's ontologico-political structuring while simultaneously demanding alternative expressions of the political.

The Politics of the *Ekphrasis* in Markets and/or Oriental Bazaars?

Virtually all comprehension in science, technology, and even art calls on our ability to visualize. In fact, the ability to visualize is almost synonymous with understanding. We have all used the expression 'I see' to mean, 'I understand.'⁸

Much work on empire and visibility considers how images (especially photographic) are technologies of power deployed to legitimate a specific world-view.⁹ Work since 9/11 has exposed the effect of such technologies on international politics.¹⁰ Some argue that this technology is changing under neoliberalism; for

Mirzoeff, it is a 'technology in crisis,' seeking new ways to govern under the 'pressure of global flows into new configurations' and limits.¹¹

The United States military has actively developed and promoted a global strategy of counterinsurgency since 2006, even as the neo-liberal market economics it intends to promote have seemed to be collapsing. Like other forms of visibility, the visibility of counterinsurgency classifies people as insurgent or not, separates those so classified—usually by material means such as walls—and then claims that this separation is right.... [But]... because this is the era of globalization, characterized by unprecedented transnational migration and electronic media, the digitized border fails to hold.¹²

The shift disrupting dominant understandings of how and under what conditions we see is both spatial and temporal. It is about global politics, namely, how to capture sites of contestation to consolidate global governance under US imperial supremacy. The global battlefield's asymmetric warfare and the global movement of people, goods, and ideas have had dramatic effects on spatiality, instigating complex world 'entanglements'¹³ that problematize democracy and capital as originary inventions of the West. This was dramatically brought home to Americans by the events of 9/11. Mirzoeff's articulation of visibility is located in the critique of empire since that moment; its possibility or practice cannot be understood outside larger global relations of power.

Other theorists argue that while images do not speak for themselves, they seem unmediated and have dire effects on policy making. Paradoxically, such theorists render invisible the fact that visibility itself is a site of contestation, specifically, of the coloniality of power, with which Quijano accounts for the entangled relations of power between global divisions: labor, racial and ethnic hierarchy, patriarchal relations, identity formation, and Eurocentric epistemologies. As I use it, the coloniality of power is an onto-political structuring process of racial and sexual relations, experiences and racial-sexual knowledge production articulating geopolitical positions and marginalized inscriptions.¹⁴ This builds on Quijano but draws out the tensions between slavery and colonization (instead of assuming them) to argue that formal capital relations are affective colonial and slave-based.¹⁵ Invoking Wilderson, Sexton says:

The application of slave law among the free has outlived...a certain form of its prior operation – the property relations specific to the institution of chattel and the plantation based agrarian economy in which it was sustained.¹⁶

Hartman talks about this structuring in her memoir, *Lose Your Mother*: as the 'afterlife of slavery,' she says, it is 'a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone ... a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago.'¹⁷

Because the coloniality of power shapes visibility, we can read approaches claiming that unmediated images affect policymaking. Such approaches presume that people do not necessarily glean insight from images constructed of specific, albeit tense, positionalities. Images are never unmediated, neither when they are made nor when they are read or viewed. They are constellations of worldviews abstracted from their contexts and reinserted in other spaces to participate with us in onto-political-structural contestations. They are not us but they are vital to our struggle to either reanimate or kill life. As Fanon states in *Black Skins White Masks*, the positionality of blackness acts as raw material for the coherency and capacity of whiteness as a positionality of subjecthood. If we take this seriously, then how we see any 'scene' becomes complicated, requiring an articulation of visibility that exposes the demands made and the pain generated on incapacitated fungible sites. Fanon tells us:

The act of violence is not the killing field, the orgy of destruction. *Violence is the visibility, the shared evil that forces together the oppressor and the oppressed. Violence is the awareness of freedom's proximity of the fragility of survival.*¹⁸

Visibility forces the oppressor and the oppressed together; the colonizer's freedom is based on the slave's fragile survival. For Fanon, this visibility cracks open the resources that modernity requires: the violence is both fungible and accumulative. He goes on to render visible the antagonism that makes possible what the world wants to see:

Fervour is the weapon of choice of the impotent; the black man wants to be white, the white man slaves to reach a human level. We are left with little doubt we are confronting a great deal of anger. The resentment takes us to a particular place: *a zone of non-being, an extraordinary sterile and arid region, where black is not a man, and mankind is digging into its own flesh to find meaning.*¹⁹

For Fanon, this antagonistic 'colonizer-colonized relationship is a struggle to the death' in which the colonizer denies any 'recognition' to the colonized.²⁰ Drawing on Fanon, I articulate a slavecracy of visibility that ontologically structures our practices of vision. This *slave-cratic-visibility* works to structure coherent subjectivities and incoherent species, experiences of exploitation and alienation, sexual and racial violences of accumulation, structurally impossible fungibilities, and racial knowledge articulating geo-onto-political positionalities. It reaches a kind of fruition in post-9/11 images of terror and terrorists.

Geopolitical (Neo)Imperial-Sovereign Adjustments: The Many Faces of Terror(ism)s

The major visual structuring positionalities of terror(ism)s in the institutionality of global politics are expressed in the following antagonisms: the imperial demand for expansion and property *versus* the call for a foreign policy that does not use force to acquire unilateral advantage but merely corrects historic violence and injustice. In the latter, imperial leaders are only partial and relational agents of contextual and purposive agency in an environment of constant flux.

Terror and terrorism are both material and demonstrative when Eurocentric modernity seeks to eliminate some at the expense of others. Terror/ism discourses seem fortified against questions of socio-political ontology that could disrupt the dominant state of affairs, and reinvigorate the ontological death of the enslaved subject. The invisibility/unspeakable nature of slavery is not just exploitation and alienation in Marx's sense but predicated on modalities of fungibility. The black body is made 'vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values; and as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master's body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power.²¹ This body serves the purposes of non-whites and whites simultaneously.²²

As long as divisions into 'us' and 'them' (i.e. Arab/US discourses) bind theorizations of the visibility of terrorisms and terrorists while presuming reconcilable forces among 'intrasettler discussions,'²³ they will be articulated as the political (in)stability of the world order. But seeking political stability does not reconcile antagonisms. Fanon argues, '[T]he destruction of the colonial world is no more and no less than the abolition of one zone, its burial in the depths of the earth.'²⁴ What one sees and what one understands are the same because of the positionality out of which specific materials and actions emerge. As Punyashloke Mishra points out, seeing is not universal; rather, it depends on positionality and temporality in power relations and structures:

[T] he experienced physician, mechanic, or physiologist looking at a wound, an engine, or a microscopic preparation 'sees' things the novice does not see. If both experts and laymen (sic) were asked to make exact copies of what they see, their drawings would be quite not the same.²⁵

For a vivid illustration of the role of visibility in the slave-cratic-visibility of power, consider the 11 January 2010 *Newsweek* cover of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab. Under a childlike black face, a title screams 'The Children of bin Laden.' But the story is about a 23-year-old Nigerian who tried to come to the US to commit a terrorist attack. The cover page gestures to images circulating in the US about black youth and their criminalization (few US citizens would identify this youth as Nigerian). It gestures to the understanding that black is ontologically dead and it makes terror visible: Africa is the originary and the final

site of the undoing of the coherency of slave-cratic-visibility structures of power. Consider the intervention of Powell, a black man, when he argued in favor of military intervention in Iraq. In his address to the UN Security Council, he showed what he called compelling visual evidence of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction:

We also have satellite photos that indicate that banned materials have recently been moved from a number of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction facilities. Let me say a word about satellite images before I show a couple. The photos that I am about to show you are sometimes hard for the average person to interpret, hard for me. The painstaking work of photo analysis takes experts with years and years of experience, poring for hours and hours over light tables. But as I show you these images, I will try to capture and explain what they mean, what they indicate to our imagery specialists.²⁶

Through his PowerPoint slides and accompanying explanatory discourse, the space in the UN was changed/framed for the world to read and the camera to record. Interestingly, when he spoke, he was standing in front of Picasso's *Guernica*, a painting memorializing the destruction of one of the oldest Basque towns during the Spanish Civil War. As noted by Dowd, US personnel thought it 'a mixed message to have Powell recommend the invasion of Iraq against [this] backdrop.'²⁷ Setting a speech about war beside a 'scene of death and destruction'²⁸ was problematic, leading aides to cover *Guernica* with a blue drape and place UN Security Council flags in front of it. US officials further obfuscated the issue by arguing that the blue background was technically better for camera coverage. But technically better for whom? On her web page at Endwar.net, Dowd includes an image of *Guernica*, posing Powell, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld in the bombed city to remind us of the destruction that accompanies these notorious faces. While her intervention²⁹ disrupted the dominant agenda, the US went ahead with business as usual.

Whatever you see, you understand. Amoores notes:

The visual realm is [not the one] through which the state secures its sovereignty via representations of the other.... [Rather] a particular mode of visibility is called up and into being in contemporary articulations of sovereignty: a visibility that categorizes and classifies people into images and imaginaries of many kinds. Sovereignty is performed.... as the drawing of lines, and the drawing of those lines is made credible, at least in part, by the reification of the visual.³⁰

Following Der Derian,³¹ Amoores argues that people participate in war because of what they see: 'People go to war...because of how they see, perceive, picture, imagine and speak of others.'³² Der Derian has explored the intertwining of the military, media and information industries, tracing how policy-makers sway audience interpretation of visual images.³³ Some international relations theorists

say that the war on terror is embedded in media where gendered terms mobilize support.³⁴ In fact, Der Derian argues that terrorism's evil face was *constituted* by the Bush administration:

Terrorism has taken on an iconic, fetishized and, most significantly, a highly optical character. After witnessing the televised images of kamikaze planes hitting the World Trade Center...we were all too ready to agree with President Bush: 'Evil now has a face.'³⁵

Of course, faces are never just faces. They are 'border zones dividing and connecting the inside and outside.'³⁶ Tausig argues that normative readings of the face constitute:

The figure of appearance, the appearance of appearance, the figure of figuration, the un-appearance, if you will, of secrecy itself as the primordial act of presencing. For the face itself is a contingency, at the magical crossroads of mask and window to the soul, one of the better-kept public secrets essential to everyday life.³⁷

In discussions of spectatorship in her work on film and viewing, Mary Ann Doane posits an equation between women viewers and visual images, whereby the latter define the former. For a woman to derive pleasure from the viewing process, she must form a masochistic over-identification with the figure onscreen, or adopt a trans-sexual, masculinized gaze, or narcissistically become the object of her own desire 'assuming the image in the most radical way.'³⁸ At first glance, the narcissistic pleasure in becoming the object of self-desire in world politics seems to be what Bush is offering.

While the faces of the terrorists as they become visualized in different media and sites initially seem to substantiate Doane's theory, they ultimately problematize notions of gendered spectatorship through the figure of a non-black flesh/human object. The terrorist's blending of binaries and engagement with the modern technologies of visibility dislodges 'him' from the traditional realm of gender, even as 'he' cites and plays with an original conception of the prototypical masculine spectator. This object's problematic identity (why would bin Laden, a rich man, attack the US, a country which trained him?) and transformation into a terrorist in different visual sites disrupt normative understandings of gendered and racialized meaning and destabilize gendered racialized spectatorship. The hyper-human, hyper-gendered object mimics both the onscreen terrorist image and the active 'terrorist' participant in world politics.

Bush draws on the conflictual division between the terrorist and non-terrorist during his unveiling of the 'Most Wanted Terrorist' list at FBI Headquarters. The language of dark and light used to illuminate the significance of the 'war on terror' shows that gender is intertwined with racial positionalities:

Terrorists try to operate in the shadows. They try to hide. But we are going to shine the light of justice on them. We list their names, we publicize their pictures, and we rob them of their secrecy. Terrorism has a *face*, and today we expose it for the world to see.³⁹



Figure 3.1 Shining a Light on ‘Terrorists’. Reprinted with the permission of the author.

In the above illustration, a camera shines a light on pictures of ‘terrorists’.⁴⁰ Although the camera becomes our guiding tool, however, it may be ‘cluster fucking’ us,⁴¹ as the terror that makes possible the emergence of terrorist acts often remains in the shadows. While the camera is pushing us to ‘see’ the terrorists, it obfuscates the fact that gratuitous terror is required to read the terrorist. By shining the ‘light of justice’ on the terrorists’ faces, the camera shows the world that the norms expressed by US subjects enable them to make the right judgments about the legitimacy and illegitimacy of violent action. As Kochi sees it, this problematic move ‘posits’ a specific ‘activity of the self (i.e., the camera is an important tool in seeing the terror in the face of the terrorist) which posit[s]...itself in and through its relations to its others.’ Further, in ‘the act of positing itself as an identity, the self excludes something other than itself and this exclusion involves negation. At a purely conceptual level such negation may not yet mobilize violence. However, when occurring within social-material life, the operation of negation, bound to the activity of positing, is very often violent or has violent consequences.’⁴²

Bush's articulation of 'light' and 'shadow' does not exist in a vacuum. Following Kochi's logic, the subject that Bush calls forward finds itself within 'a set of normative institutional discursive regimes.' Such subjects are being called upon by Bush to 'posit themselves and their normative claims against their others in the world.'⁴³ Indeed, in this framing of the terrorists, the US citizens are called forward to 'face' the truth that terrorists are there to kill them and end their dreams of freedom and justice. Such descriptions, in the words of Kahana, 'configure a national-popular condition of trauma, a state in which the condition of being a good American flows directly from the production or consumption of ... images of international violence.'⁴⁴

Bush here certainly *entertains* the idea of a traumatic *episteme* of terror. But he evokes a quite different historicization of terror and justice and the relation of both to truth. The prevalence of the discourse of the just and 'light' subject in his speeches reflects the premise that the US and its own terror practices are justified. In this way, various forms of visualization of the terrorist create a self-enclosed economy of discourses about terror, a system within which the statements of Bush do not narrate the truth about global power and the terror that grounds its erection but rather strategies to bypass the role of the US in that formation. This framing, this epistemological fetishization of light and shadow if you will, is a particular kind of visual act. It makes no reference to conditions, and it justifies the legitimacy of declaring war anywhere and everywhere, using terror to eliminate terrorism. The epistemological fetishization of the human/animal who is hyper-masculine, dark, and non-English-speaking provides the evidence necessary to fight the 'war on terror.' In turn, the capture of these gendered subjects will enable the non-white and white man (also hyper-masculine) to eradicate terrorism (not necessarily terror).

In fact, face and terrorism are superimposed. This presumes an anthropocentric view of the subject (dominant in the biopolitics literature) as knowable and makes possible another epistemological move—to render invisible the role of existing materiality. Invisibility is crucial, as 'materiality itself is an active and unpredictable political force that disrupts such dominant understandings and their contingent biopolitical apparatuses by revealing them to be constantly negotiated, open, vulnerable and absurd approaches and practices.'⁴⁵ The materiality of 'other' flesh, suffering, and pain, are not accounted for in this articulation, even when this flesh, its suffering and pain mediate the everyday material coherency of terror/ism/s coded as good and evil, 'cowboy nation' against 'terrorist mastermind.'

The Manichean logic used by Bush and his administration allowed the US to declare a doctrine of pre-emption and long-term war.⁴⁶ President Bush seemed less eager to reflect on the more problematic aspects of this version of the 'West,' including its longstanding colonial violence against Native American communities and the institution of slavery upon which the US was built. Ignoring this colonial (i.e., theft of the native American land and eradication of native communities) and slave violence, Bush's visual imagery, his creation of a face called terrorist/s, allowed him to elicit both domestic and international support.⁴⁷ He did not frame

the attacks of 9/11, as ‘crimes’ but depicted the US as a victim of terror (not the sponsor of terror). This became the reason for pursuing the al-Qaeda network in places such as Afghanistan (initially with international acquiescence) and Iraq, ultimately punishing transgressors who had nothing to do with al-Qaeda. The Bush administration has been accused of bypassing international legal conventions and the UN—both of which the US helped create after World War II⁴⁸—and collapsing the distinctions between domestic crime-fighting and global warfare⁴⁹; in short, the US has used the war on terror to rid itself of its enemies, internal and external and even constitute its imperial leadership role anew.

Within this context, the slave-cratic-visuality of power becomes significant. The US generated technologies of governance to control anxiety and to articulate its role in world politics anew. Al-Qaeda, a ‘shadowy network led by an apparently evil genius’⁵⁰ was to be captured by consolidating and making visible its face. The Bush administration animated slave-cratic-visuality, an ontologico-political relation of gratuitous terror which is fundamental to erecting a coherent project of conflict between the US and its terrorist enemies.⁵¹ Reading the site of conflict about terrorism through the lens of slave-cratic-visuality of power makes visible the structural visibility of violence in a Fanonian sense; it also makes apparent that the visual grammar upon which ‘experts’ draw to transform data into ‘key knowledges’ (albeit problematic and inconsistent in its support of visualization discourses and ‘mixed-initiative systems’) is a tangible and timely technology of violence⁵² that feeds on black criminals. The kind of material required to generate and consolidate a slave-cratic-visuality structure is mostly ‘skin color’ a code for the black body. Dodds comments on a color system mixing science and technology with bodies:

[It ranged] from the Department of Homeland Security’s colour-coded security warnings to leaflets issued by the US Postal Service warning citizens to make an emergency supply kit, a family communication plan and remain informed. More disturbingly, ... countless Arab-Americans (as well as international visitors from particular parts of the world and/or ethnic backgrounds) found to their cost that even skin colour could be a sufficient visual prompt to stimulate fears of a possible imminent strike against the USA.... The power to define and to visualize dangerous bodies was critically important, especially to those considered suspect and or deviant.⁵³

Dodds notes the intertwined relationship of the slave-cratic-visuality power matrix but does not engage with the visual analytic data structures, intermediate articulations and outputs that support the seamless integration of tools to *conquer, calculate, enslave, terror(ize) and slaughter*. A close tracing of slave-cratic-visuality requires paying attention to the violence itself through the dominant frames articulated by the US leadership. Gregory notes the changing spatialities of modern war including the War on Terror, and the new ways that visibility shifts from visualizing information⁵⁴ to producing ‘visual-analytics which affect the

concrete materialities of military violence.⁵⁵ Thomas defines visual analytics as a technology which allows creative thinking to 'detect the expected and discover the unexpected.'⁵⁶ These new technologies intersect with 'counter-geographies [and counter-technologies] constructed by artists and writers' and activists to limit what imperial sites want to do: capture, reconstruct and generate subjects.

With this caveat, I conjunct the US Constitution with other sites in my bid to understand the slave-cratic-visuality of power. I note the mobilization of technologies of governance, including things people use in their everyday lives to gesture to the conflict between white and non-white subjects, always presuming that this kind of conflict requires the undertaking of the gratuitous terror with black flesh that Fanon talks about in *Black Skins White Masks*. Osama's face turns up on toilet paper, mobilizing imaginaries about civilization, cleanliness and Orientalism.⁵⁷ In effect, Osama is asked to 'kiss my butt,' thereby presuming sexual subordination and the 'wiping' out of terrorism and terrorists. A mark on Osama's forehead indicates where he is to be shot.⁵⁸

In an image on a deodorant, we read that terrorism stinks and can be eliminated by the use of this everyday product. The name, 'New Goat Scent,' locates bin Laden in a nomadic genealogy where goats are crucial elements of the economy and social life; it also articulates him as an animal. This deodorant, we read in the accompanying text, is strong enough for a camel (another animal) but is made for an 'asshole.'

Such problematic gestures, when conjuncted, point to selective genealogies that make possible specific mobilizations necessary to remove the other, whose complicated history 'normative' North American subjects do not wish to know. Yes, he originated in the desert as a nomad (the Hadramut region of Yemen) but he is also the product of a royal family, the product of *asabiyya* (solidarity) and part of a mixed religious formation with strong kinship ties. Although royal, and therefore privileged, one could say that he forsook a life of luxury for the creation of a new world based on the freedom of the Ummah (the community) and to making the Shariah the supreme law where military threat is no longer possible:

The removal of these governments is an obligation upon us, and a necessary step to free the Ummah, to make the Shariah the supreme law and to regain Palestine. And our fight against these governments is not separate from our fight against you.

You steal our wealth and oil at paltry prices because of your international influence and military threats. This theft is indeed the biggest theft ever witnessed by mankind in the history of the world.⁵⁹

Bin Laden calls on the American people to challenge and change Western civilization, 'the worst civilization witnessed by the history of mankind.' He accuses the US of not following 'the knowledge of the laws which govern their lives:

You are the nation who, rather than ruling by the Shariah of Allah in its Constitution and Laws, choose to invent your own laws as you will and desire. You separate religion from your policies, contradicting the pure nature which affirms Absolute Authority to the Lord and your Creator. You flee from the embarrassing question posed to you: How is it possible for Allah the Almighty to create His creation, grant them power over all the creatures and land, grant them all the amenities of life, and then deny them that which they are most in need of: knowledge of the laws which govern their lives?⁶⁰

In bin Laden's view, the US is an impure power. The response to bin Laden's call on Americans to purify themselves and their land leads to his articulation as lower in a hierarchy of humans and more toward the species camp. This articulation is made visible in the goat-scented deodorant: bin Laden and the Taliban stink.



Figure 3.2 Goat-Scented Deodorant. Reprinted with permission of the author.

Another image shows Osama being anally penetrated by the Empire State Building, after the twin towers, the most recognizable piece of Manhattan Skyline. The anal penetration avenges the destruction of the twin towers and reveals his subservience: he is not the alpha male leader of al-Qaeda. He is subordinated and/or further feminized by the question 'You like skyscrapers, huh, bitch?' This hyper-feminized hyper-sexualization of Osama is a consistent theme in the circulating normative discourses of the war on terror. These discourses consistently express

imperial anxiety while containing it by arguing that even when bin Laden is a threat to both state and sexual purity,⁶¹ he is not as powerful people think.

The Matrix of Violence: Segregating the Positions of Contingency and Gratuity

Fanon reminds us that white supremacy is built on violence and, more specifically, terror; positions of contingent violence are asymmetrically positioned to zone 'subjects' who are white and 'species' who are black. This social distinction is crucial, as it cannot be assessed or redressed through visual discourses. Hence, speaking of the visual text as either a representation or as a signifying practice is problematic. In articulating the zoning of positions through contingent and gratuitous practices, or what I call a slave-cratic-visibility of power, we can foreground the kinds of violence that make possible our world order. Hartman says: 'It is impossible to fully redress this pained condition without the occurrence of an event of epic and revolutionary proportions...the destruction of a racist's social order'⁶² which itself depends on obfuscating the relationship between life and death.

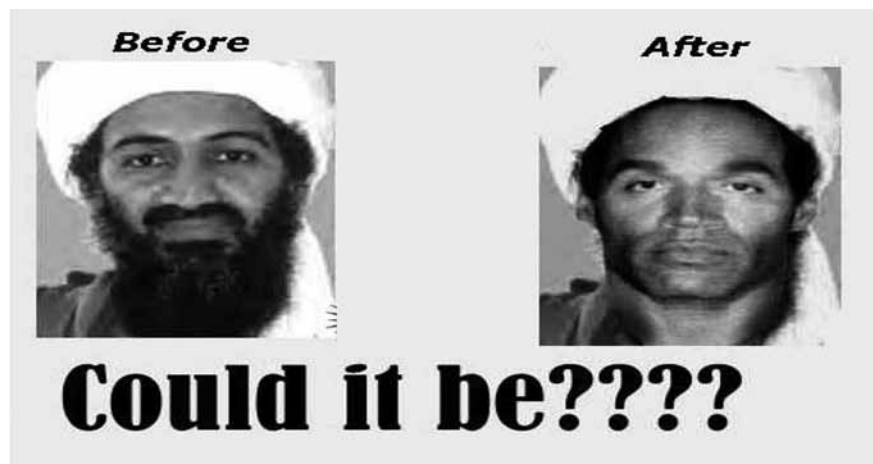


Figure 3.3 Before/After. Reprinted with permission of the author.

In a 'Before' and 'After' image, bin Laden turns into O.J. Simpson. Is this merely an attempt to create an analogy between bin Laden and Simpson as black men? Or does it point to the limits of identification by linking one 'violent' man to another? Like Fanon, I argue that the fundamental violence able to undo this order is dismantling the structural relations that sustain in place slavery and blackness. Hence, the transposition of bin Laden onto Simpson is more than the association

of one criminal man with another. Rather, I read this transposition to gesture to a constituted anxiety about blackness. Engle⁶³ argues that the indistinguishability of bin Laden and Simpson in this image is about the ‘terror of miscegenation’ which ‘begs the question: where is Nicole in this fantasy? Why did this image in particular get made—why does it “make sense”?’ In answering her own question Engle states: ‘At the risk of sounding Freudian, it’s all about the penis here, more specifically about the American obsession with the black man’s penis as a threat to racial purity.’⁶⁴ While I agree there is an anxiety about racial purity, this image at this moment is not merely about displacing the white woman (by the way, where is the black woman?); it is also about articulating the global anxiety of undoing the structures erected on black bodies, on slave relations.

But why turn bin Laden’s face into O.J. Simpson wearing a keffiyeh? What is at stake in this epistemological move? Could the fear be about exposing a secret that cannot be bracketed in the constitution of empire? Could it be about losing what enlightened modernity promises, while hiding that this project requires terror and that racial (always heterosexual and even homonormative collusion) purity in the global context goes hand-in-hand with political and economic power?⁶⁵ Historically, the most common rationalization for lynching a black man was the accusation of raping a white woman. Could this slave-craic-visibility of power be about the structural adjustment of sexual desire as an expression of global power? The charge of rape became the excuse for murder and the desire to slaughter the black ‘species’ was articulated as ontologically impossible. This transposition points to the anxieties that terrorism awakens. This same terror fetishizes black flesh (as the black subject is ontologically impossible) by committing gratuitous violence again and again on it, by showing it to be the ultimate disgusting possibility into which a subject can unfold. However, as Judy says:

[Blacks] are always already dead wherever you find them. The nurturing haven of black culture which assured memory and provided a home beyond the ravishing growth of capitalism is no longer. There cannot be any cultural authenticity in resistance to capitalism. The illusion of immaterial purity is no longer possible. It is no longer possible to be black against the system. Black folk are dead, killed by their own faith in willfully being beyond, and in spite of, power.⁶⁶

This major methodological move or what Judy calls ‘Africa as paralogism’⁶⁷ renders invisible how a nonrepresentational concept of terror is at stake in world politics (and in visibility/terrorist studies), one that now preoccupies normative understandings of terrorism and the terrorist. The black person as the ‘phenomenal event and not an intelligible object of humanity’⁶⁸ makes coherent the terrorism conflict.

Maurizio Ferraris writes that *any* response to the ontological question of ‘what is there?’ always comes down to a finger: ‘A finger, generally the index gives a sign toward something, and indicates it as *this*.’ For him, this ‘is *presence*, ontology in the simple and hyperbolic sense.’⁶⁹ Ferraris engages with the ‘obstinate

superstition' that 'holds [children] incapable of abstraction' because they 'look at the finger ... instead of what the index is pointing to.'⁷⁰ Children stare at

*the agency which designates – the act of designation – rather than that which is intended. Thus the over-attention of the naïve, captive, and attentive disciple inadvertently and unintentionally points to the fact that we are always guided, led, directed, pointed to something, by some guide or guiding act of designation. A designator determines designation. Disciples are taught what to look at and what to see and what not to see. What disciples see is what they are in a sense shown (or trained) how to see.*⁷¹

Bin Laden takes the idea of the non-western subject as a child and pushes its logic to include 'children' as the zone of global power contestations: 'What has the West given the world? A lust for power and a license to loot and plunder the poorer countries ... Millions of innocent children are being killed as I speak.'⁷²

If we agree with Ferraris that 'the presence of the index is no less problematic than everything it points to,'⁷³ then we must consider the reasons behind the obsession to point to the image of bin Laden as terrorist. Watts asks: 'What happens to my fist (noun-object) when I open my hand?'⁷⁴ The question suggests that ways of thinking determine what can be seen, understood, or expressed. Thus, what may seem like an *object* may perhaps be better construed as a *process within a larger onto-politico-economic framework*.⁷⁵

Bin Laden cannot be reduced to euro-logo-centric expressions of meaning. The performative reiteration of 'material' and 'affect' from heterogeneous registers, such as myths, historical events, or entry positions organize bodily and affective practice. Of course, such expressions can be placed in historical context and accounted for in world politics, not explained away as epiphenomenal expressions of larger historical and political processes. But processes like bin Laden are also *productive* of their historical contexts—they are transformative articulations. But what is the nature of this contestation? Drawing on Greek theory, Webb argues that 'the visual impact is not an end in itself but has the further effect of producing an emotional impact, involving the listener in the events...[Thucydides and Herodotus] are sources of visual experience which transports the reader back to the events described, involving him both imaginately and emotionally.'⁷⁶ Under the French imperial moment, Fanon writes of the intertwining of the visual and the affective. His work always makes visible the problem of taking hold of violence by theorizing the tensions, which divide the world into the zones of the colonized and the colonizer and constitute the black body as an object⁷⁷ of gratuitous violence.⁷⁸ Said, while critical of the West in *Orientalism*, argues for the reconciliation of white and Arab subjects in world politics. However, to be consistent with Fanon, and for Orientalism to work, while the logic behind any given appropriation, gaze, or visual expression does not need to be accurate, the socio-economic relations and spatio-temporal configurations must be made invisible. The less cohesive the

logic, the more productive Orientalism becomes in organizing a universal order that is not truly global.⁷⁹ Said states:

In other words, we need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate. What it is trying to do... is at one and the same time to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are *for* Europe, and only for Europe. Hence the vacillation between the familiar and the alien; Mohammed is always the imposter (familiar, because he pretends to be like the Jesus we know) and always the Oriental (alien, because although he is in some ways 'like' Jesus, he is after all not like him).⁸⁰

Postcolonial theorist Rey Chow argues that many key historical intellectual and cultural encounters with the forces of 'modernity' are 'specifically grounded in visibility.'⁸¹ Visibility is itself a site used by imperial leaders to constitute a universal order of the world by appropriating those vital energies of subjects who challenge what passes for knowledge. Bin Laden's depiction as the militant who brought terrorism to the United States presumes that the US was a safe haven until the moment of his intervention. The rendering of the US as a still site that exploded through bin Laden's agency and then returned to stillness is a rhythmic motif that encapsulates the fundamentals of the terrorist *event* as a *social project*, not merely a moment in world politics.

Bin Laden's secret penetration into the US to mobilize terrorists signals a displacement, a transformation on many registers: the universal and its trajectory of a global that is not truly global even when it refigures the other either in the concept of the nation or the concept of the racial or at the moment it institutes anew moral regions in the name of self-determination or universality⁸² the international and the domestic, public and private discursive, affective, and the corporeal. It collapses one of the major fantasies of conquest: namely, homonormative desire as mediated by white heterosexuality. As fantasies are dynamically linked with what Butler calls 'social norms,' certain values and practices that 'are variously lived as psychic reality'⁸³ are no longer possible:

Norms are not only embodied; rather, embodiment is itself a mode of interpretation, not always conscious, which subjects normativity itself to an iterable temporality... Norms are not static entities, but [are] incorporated and interpreted features of existence that are sustained by the idealizations furnished by fantasy.⁸⁴

This fantasy points to the identification of a hyper-masculine phallic and heteronormative terrorist.⁸⁵ However, a *reinterpretation* of dominant universal norms could repeat, transform, and even *disrupt* dominant norms, fantasies, and discourses⁸⁶ sexual, racial, and otherwise.

Bin Laden's intervention in the discourses and lived practices of international politics gestures to the multiple connections among signification, identification, desires, and bodily practices, not to mention the epistemological shifts in history and globality. Indeed, the historical moment of the penetration of bin Laden might be regarded as a convergence with many different impulses, including the non-aligned-movement and the Islamic movement, that contest the power of global coloniality. Consider, for example, attempts by political Islamists to capture state power in Afghanistan, especially since the 1990s when US collaboration ended and foreign policy shifted: 'The Afghan mujahedeen felt they were left in the lurch with the closing of the tap of US arms flow, Saudi financial support, and Pakistan's military training and assistance following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.'⁸⁷

This move is not only problematic but converges with another colonial-traumatic visuality: the violent effacing of social practices informed by a modernity based on the French Revolutionary slogan of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and their replacement with a modernity based on the prioritization of technology and market extractions. The latter notion of modernity has come to be associated with Euro-American liberalism, a project that 'self-consciously cuts its links with all that had gone before,' privileging and universalizing the Eurocentric worldview 'over the supposedly *historyless* and *cultureless* non-European world':

It is this erasure of the non-European that gives the project of Enlightenment modernity its strong Eurocentric impulse: shaping empire-building projects on the one hand, while on the other, inferiorizing the colonized elite to a point wherein they have internalized the ideas of modernity, especially the notion of the 'normal' nation-state ... This imperialist thrust ... has severely undermined and restructured the economic and political dimension, compartmentalizing thought and action, and displacing socially uplifting ideas of Third Worldism and autarky with neoliberal restructuring and the re-imposition of the social and cultural legacies of the colonial state.⁸⁸

Those in the Middle East and Central Asia know the violence that accompanies the colonizer. As Fanon would say, the violence marked on their bodies has been mediated by the murderous exclusions of black flesh and slavery, processes part and parcel of their constitution as 'coherent' subjects but also of their property and state relations.

One might wonder why the image of bin Laden, one of the richest men in the Middle East, mobilizes so many foot soldiers in the madrasahs of militant Islam. Who are these people? What kinds of affects inform and shape this mobilization? Before answering, we must recognize that the US has moved systematically to consolidate profit accumulation as an expression of the neoliberal capitalist imperialist expansion. It has deliberately enlisted support from Islamic states in its 'war on terror' to further its access to Central Asian and Middle Eastern resources and to consolidate its military-industrial and security-industrial complexes.⁸⁹ The

US war on terrorism has enabled the 'heightened state of US militarism and the national security state to safeguard its long term objective'⁹⁰ within the Middle East and Central Asia.

Many recruits to militant Islam, meanwhile, are not just 'poor [people] who have relied on the madrasahs for their very survival, and have been politicized and radicalized to pick up the gun in defense of what their indoctrination tells them: Islam is under threat from a non-Muslim, Judeo-Christian axis.'⁹¹ Admittedly, some are poor, but many are middle-class subjects who recognize that democracy and freedom are not the monopoly of the West or North American elites. They are not crazy; they recognize that their lives do not have to happen at the expense of those living next door. Yet their country's capital, social, and military elites are extracting their resources, including their labor and life, and are not providing for them; instead, they are stealing their energies to increase their profits.⁹² Consequently, the madrasahs become sites of contestation.

Bin Laden expresses modernity's conflicting visual trajectories. He is a political Muslim and a militant, an imaginary who revitalizes Islam by reclaiming the medieval era when the political and the sacred first merged. This harkening, though problematic in its expression of an outdated vision of the world, needs to be understood for what it awakens in people of the MENA region and the larger disenfranchised world:

[Bin Laden] posit[s] a distinct identity for political Islam, one that is separate from the project of Western secular separation between church and state. In this context, Islamic revivalism is at best a late nineteenth century development, and the actions of political Islamists have formed in the period when Western modernity had its greatest influence in the colonies – that is, both are articulated in the spread of Western education, the propagation of the ideology of nationalism, and the emergence of anticolonial movements. As such, political Islam and its militant tendency should be seen as a contemporary political response to a 'moral decline' that is perceived to have accompanied Western modernity. This is a powerful argument for the recruitment of potential foot soldiers of militant Islam. This argument is also a challenge to the European paradigm of modernity and cannot be dismissed as just a medieval aberration. The political Islamist position is as much a 'modern' manifestation – albeit not within a Eurocentric notion of capitalist modernity.⁹³

Bin Laden embodies these tensions. Thus, the encounter with the terrorist is an encounter with a fantasy, but one that challenges the modernity intended to bring about liberty, equality and fraternity. Both the fantasy and the incitement to action call out to the *visual and are mediated through bodies which ground their erection on black flesh or species*. This slave-craic-visuality of power mobilizes Eastern and Western bodies in different ways. From a Western perspective, one need not distinguish the political, cultural and ideological differences between, say, the many kinds of Muslim nationalists. What matters is a fantasy of the physicality

of the terrorist. The fantasy conjuncts hitherto geographically, culturally, and politically distinct elements.

As a subject constituted as Eastern and always hiding in a cave (and therefore out of this world), bin Laden works within the frameworks of a 'nationalistic-muslim' imaginary, calling, as we have seen, for an identification with 'traditional' (i.e., located temporally in the past) Islamic values, even though US foreign policy frameworks understand him as a modern, swift and seductive subject who knows technologies of universal power and techniques of terrorism. In addition to the visual constitution of bin Laden as terrorist, he is now the subject of many products produced in his name, as for example, the bin Laden cologne found in bazaars across Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia and parts of India. Bin Laden has responded evasively to the long line of products cashing in on his name, including t-shirts, thermoses, lighters, desktop air conditioners and YBA art installations:⁹⁴ 'Everyone has his or her own unique tastes and body chemistry...what works for me and my friends may not work for you.' If this nonchalant response really comes from bin Laden, it brings to the fore, it seems to me, the corporeality that a universal political economy must capture if it wishes to continue and create the global order anew. It captures its own violence and turns it into something for sale. Bin Laden's answer, while complicating the visibility of terror by gesturing to its concrete context, also gestures to the materiality of family and dwelling in this political economy. Bin Laden recentralizes the issue of power by arguing that what works for one body may not work for others, namely those who are not Euro-North Americans.

The cologne's discussion is about capitalism, even though the US audience shows an inability to critique its agents directly by calling the cologne 'urine.' *Weekly World News* quoted a CIA operative as saying, 'The stuff reeks like an open sewer ... we sent some to one of our labs for analysis, and we found that camel sweat was one of its key ingredients.'⁹⁵ It is also a kind of talking about bin Laden. If the product is communicating something about bin Laden, then it perhaps refers to his relation to global politics and the formation of subjects, including his own. In fact, this product and how it is made visible opens up the space for a sustained account of today's world politics and its accompanying terror. Its visibility also shifts the possibilities of the market: products that sell in the name of terrorist change things somewhat. Now the market sets the terms of the relationship between state and capital.

In a realist sense, bin Laden is the enemy of the US. He uses military wares to speak the language of materialist politics, striking at his 1980s master (who supported him) while denying that he is the attacker. He is a dangerous subject, so to speak. The subject of terrorism antagonizes the imperial colonizer, even as the imperial colonizer remains in control. Ultimately, this colonial-imperial 'coherent' tension draws on the ontopolitically structural impossibility: the relation of the property owner and the slave. In the market, however, the terrorist remains a constituent element of decisions to produce commodities. Hence, even if we remain within the conservative heteronormative Orientalism of us vs. them championed

by Bush, the question remains: if bin Laden is the personification of the ultimate male fantasy and practice of terrorist-hyper-masculinity⁹⁶—everything the US does not want to be—what happens when bin Laden becomes animated in the market? What other fantasy and what other reactive take over?

What emerges from the visual images mentioned here is that bin Laden is modeled on specific masculinity of power; his techniques are appropriated directly from the imperial-colonizer (i.e., US leaders). At the same time, he seems fearless, powerful, empowering, lean and muscular (he stands about six feet five inches, according to the FBI) and rational in his every move. He exemplifies a masculinity that refuses the seductions of the West, while fetishizing such forms of production as explosives and militant insurgencies.

Could bin Laden be pointing to certain activities which have proliferated because of ideological tensions related to globalization? Could the ways bin Laden expresses himself be just marketing techniques? In his speeches and activities could he be pointing to the shattering experiences many are facing today—what it means to be have been stolen by capital, by law, by democracy? Could what bin Laden does and says point to other worlds and worldviews, albeit contradictorily? In his argument on Japanese identity *vis-à-vis* the West, Stephen Chan says the Japanese had to construct a stereotype of themselves *for* themselves: ‘They had to colonize themselves, to prevent too easy a colonization by others.’⁹⁷ For Chan, such a perspective ‘proposes a nuanced breathing space between Said’s (or indeed Bhabha’s) views of Orientalism on the one hand, and the somewhat cheeky counterpointing of this by a group of scholars who talk of the East’s “Occidentalism.”’⁹⁸ Chan suggests that Asians ‘simultaneously orientalize *and* occidentalize [themselves], particularly those who, by accident of birth and by the deliberateness of constant travel, traverse and inhabit and (frankly) *play with* borderlines.’⁹⁹ This can be regarded as bin Laden’s strategy—a peculiar kind of ‘resistance,’ an incitement to violence¹⁰⁰ akin, albeit only partially, to what Fanon says about decolonization: ‘decolonization itself is always a violent phenomenon’ and the origin of violence is colonization itself.¹⁰¹ If the slave-craic visuality of power as I articulate it here brings to the fore that the conflict between bin Laden and the US is not a ‘traditional’ or ‘normative’ event which forecloses the present but rather a conflict that points out how the social energy of the non-Western subject, middle-class, and poor is oriented toward the production of a sense of permanence for some at their expense, could bin Laden’s practices be pointing to the fact that terror can no longer be contained outside Euro-US contexts? Is bin Laden protesting the impossibility of the promised *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*? Could this be what the different visual constitutions of the terrorist seek to contain? In response, I draw on Rey Chow’s engagement with the colonizer/colonized relationship:

For those groups on the side of non-white cultures, the problem presented by multiculturalism remains one of tactical negotiation. Negotiating a point of entry into the multicultural scene means nothing less than posing the question of rights – the right to representation and the right to culture. What this implies is much

more than the mere fight (by a particular nonwhite culture) for its 'freedom of speech,' because the very process of attaining 'speech' here is inextricably bound up with right, that is, with the processes through which particular kinds of 'speeches' are legitimized in the first place. To put it in very simple terms, a non-white culture, in order to 'be' or to 'speak,' must (1) seek legitimacy/recognition from white culture, which has denied the reality of the 'other' cultures all along; (2) use the language of white culture (since it is the dominant one) to produce itself (so that it could be recognized and thus legitimized); and yet (3) resist complete normativization by white culture.¹⁰²

This complicated situation, born of the complexities of 'looking at and being looked at, being placed and placing, decided and deciding'¹⁰³ is always asymmetrical. Chow notes 'the ensconcing of the individual within the confines of her ethnic ghetto' and the attempts by 'cultural critics' to confer 'on her and her culture a radical meaning, one that is different from the norm of their own society.'¹⁰⁴

While Chow argues that ethnic politics push people into ethnic ghettos, I argue that these politics are global and play a significant role in asymmetrically locating the 'other' in the terror landscape that presumes certain species to be already the object of gratuitous violence. One could perhaps say, that the terrorism market cannot exist without the structures of terror. Hence, the production of bin Laden products cannot take place without the structures of terror. The cologne commentary begins: 'Eau de terrorist: if you want to smell like camel droppings on a hot day, and support terrorism at the same time, then try the Osama cologne.' A response at the end reads:

Not everyone who goes for the cologne is buying it to pay tribute to the terrorist... 'I use it to clean rust off my tools, and my wife says it's great for getting out bloodstains when she washes our clothes,' says another shopkeeper. 'But you have to be sure you wear a mask and gloves when you use it – the fumes are horrible, and our baby broke out in terrible rash when I spilled some of it on him.'

In the images cited here, Osama is always located in nature, living in a cave or associated with goats and camels. As he cannot be 'domesticated,' he must be bracketed outside civilization. Chow talks about primitivization as a process of universalizing the existence of multiple worlds:

The primitive, as the figure for this irretrievable *common/place*, is thus always an invention after the fact – a fabrication of a *pre* that occurs in the time of the *post* ... This *exoticizing* of what is at the same time thought to be generic and commonplace characterizes the writing of history *within a culture* as much as the writing between cultures such as the practices of orientalism.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion: The Epistemology of Slave-cratic-visibility-as-materially-affective Wrestling in a Universal Order not Truly Global

Kara Keeling argues:

Once the recurrent violence of ...enslavement and the configuration of temporality authorized by that violence have been acknowledged, studies regarding race and representation will be relieved of their quest to locate and identify more accurate (somehow less problematic) representations, and charged with the task of understanding and articulating (in ways that...must hold open the possibility of the impossible) the socio-economic relations and the spatio-temporal configurations made visible by images. The latter project requires that every recognition of 'the Black' and 'the White' must entail an acknowledgement of the violence which authorizes that recognition.¹⁰⁶

As Keeling understands, the slave-cratic-visibility of global power depends upon a new understanding of images as material-relational-affective-relations that asymmetrically segregate the global matrix of violence between gratuitous and legitimate violence. Taking seriously the idea that images are rife with epistemologies that do not recognize some subjects as bodies or legitimate agents of world politics can provide an important counterpoint to existing commonsense insights of terror, turning our attention to emergent politico-economic and ontological relationships in the context of globalization. As a means of recording and including the fluidities of an actor's everyday expression as vital insights, visibility-as-bearing-witness speaks to emergent global power contestations even as it indexes historical forms.

Rather than highlighting visibility's capacity to accurately represent a past or access a subject's identity, I use visibility-as-contestation to navigate the tensions of the present and to intervene in and interrogate the politico-economic and ontological fabrics of these tensions. I do not seek to read transnational actors as a palimpsest of historical forms preserved within visibility. These tensions of the present are created not only by targeted acts of terror, but also by the quotidian transformations of flesh (i.e., slaughtering with impunity), mediated by bodies' spatial and temporal coherency, if you will. In an age marked by acts of terror and insurgent militancy as well as by the massive proliferation of data, we need to rethink visibility and optics. More specifically, we need to rearticulate visibility: to this end, I articulate slave-cratic-visibility to mean as-material-affective event, practice, approach to seeing and sensing, adapting it to a global order that claims to safeguard peace so as to 'encompass a dynamic sense of ordering and interpretation, unmoored from the politics of preservation and evidence creation for historical understanding.'¹⁰⁷ In contexts like the Middle East and many others, such an approach is invaluable, for it points to the possibilities of a politics based on anticipation rather than on known processes of power and subject ordering. The notion of visibility-as-an-open-ended-contestation of organizing world

politics enables the production of tools of political action; it takes a different view of interrogation and intervention to achieve political transformation. In this epistemological approach, actors and their objects of desire are part of a transforming infrastructural landscape; they are not static indicators to be rearranged with new infrastructural input. Visuality-as-materially-affective undoing of global power relations, in other words, does not merely plot already known historical transitions; it also moves away from considering these spatial transformations as essential to our understanding of contemporary politics. I posit visibility not as a question but rather as an interrogation of the politics of the present, 'the present not necessarily as temporal unit inserted between the past and the future...but precisely as that vulnerable space, that precarious and elusive entry-point through which we might bring [a] radically different temporal experience into being... as a systematic modification in the logic of our social life.'¹⁰⁸ This slave-cratic-visibility is an ecology of mobile forms and processes that have a profound bearing on our understanding of both past and present. Such an approach has practical pedagogical implications, particularly for the understanding of subjects and flesh and political actors harnessing creativity for the production and/or undoing of terror orders in which they find themselves.

By providing a theoretical apparatus for a visibility of emergent relations rather than isolating and classifying certain forms as belonging to the past and others to the present, a slave-cratic-visibility framework serves as a methodological intervention into the constitution of everyday relations anew. Flesh, bodies, and visibility play a central role in constituting our understanding of the unfolding of global power. Flesh as *a* vital medium constantly mediates the relation of bodies (i.e., subjects), and its social energy makes possible bodies and their relations. Beginning with an account of the epistemological tools that dominate the understanding of political actors like bin Laden and the static notion of visibility-as-image that represents the essence of bodies of terrorists associated with racialized, gendered, and sexualized approaches, this chapter unpacks new understandings of flesh, bodies, and visibility. The point of this engagement is to suggest new ways of understanding these in the context of globalization. A different understanding of visibility, one that moves away from an identity-based sense of bodies and bears witness to onto-political structuring relationalities could be a new way to approach corporeal power and its relation to terror. Species and corporeal understandings of terror and its disruption that underpin normative international relations theory are inadequate to describe the complexities of contemporary global politics. These inadequate understandings also underwrite non-western corporealities as nothing more than zones of terrorism and violence on the global political landscape. In order to produce an account of the non-western corporealities that challenges this segregated understanding of political process, slave-cratic visibility guides our inquiry of terror and enables us to think in the interregnum where asymmetries of violence and terror want to rule. In the space where the 'shadow that the light of Being has not been able to illumine'¹⁰⁹ we need to rethink visibility, its

epistemologies and methods, 'to open up the possibility of an idea of polity from that envisioned by the metaphysical and Roman West.'¹¹⁰

Notes

¹ This epistemological motto comes from a press conference held by Donald Rumsfeld, US Secretary of Defense at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. See US Department of Defense News Transcript for June 6, 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s020606g.htm>.

² Gordon, M. 2001. The Fragile City; 'There Were No Sounds of Lamentation'. *New York Times*, 16 September. [Online]. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/16/nyregion/the-fragile-city-there-were-no-sounds-of-lamentation.html> [accessed 14 March 2011].

³ Suarez, H.J. 2010. *The Insolence of the Filipinas: Mothering Nationalism, Globalization, and Literature*. Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, 4.

⁴ Mondzai, M-J. 2005. *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 152.

⁵ Chuh, K. 2003. *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique*. Durham: Duke University Press, 120.

⁶ Desai, J. 2004. *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film*. New York: Routledge, 68.

⁷ See Agathangelou, A.M. 2010. Bodies of Desire, Terror and the War in Eurasia: Impolite Disruptions of (Neo)Liberal Internationalism, Neoconservatism and the 'New Imperium'. *Millennium. Journal of International Studies* 38(3), 1–30.

⁸ Cook, K.A, Earnshaw, R.A. and Stasko, J. 2007. Discovering the Unexpected. *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications*. *IEEE Computer Society* 27(5), 15. [Online]. Available at: http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/xpls/abs_all.jsp?arnumber=4302578&tag=1.

⁹ See Said, E. 1979. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage; Shepherd, L.J. 2004. Visualizing Violence: Legitimacy and Authority in the 'War on Terror.' *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1(2), 213–226.

¹⁰ See Der Derian, J. 2009. *Virtuous War: mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network*. New York, NY and London: Routledge; Williams, R. and Williams, E. 2003. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. New York, NY and London: Routledge; Spanos, W. 2000. *American Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire*. Minneapolis, MN and London: Minnesota University Press. For questions on terrorism see Shepherd, *Visualizing Violence*, 213–226; Der Derian, *Virtuous War*, and Williams and Williams, *Television*. For security politics, see Shepherd, *Visualizing Violence*, and Spanos, *American Shadow*.

¹¹ Mirzoeff, N. (2011) The Crisis of Visuality/Visualizing the Crisis. *E-mesférica* 7(1), 2. [Online]. Available at: <http://hemi.nyu.edu/hemi/en/e-misferica-71/mirzoeff>.

¹² Mirzoeff, Crisis of Visuality, 1–2.

¹³ Mbembe, A. 2001. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 14–16.

¹⁴ See Wilderson, F. 2010. *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Wilderson sets out the terms for this ontological structure of race, problematizing metaphysics and arguing 'political ontology is not

a metaphysical notion, because it is the outcome of a politics and thereby available to historic challenge and collective struggle;' cited in Sexton, J. 2010. People-of-Color-Blindness. Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery. *Social Text* 28(3), 31–56. See also Saldivar, J.D. 2006. Border Thinking, Monoritized Studies, and Realist Interpellations: The Coloniality of Power from Gloria Anzaldúa to Arundhati Roy, in *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, edited by S. Mohanty, L. Martin Alcoff, M. Hames-García, and P. Moya. New York, NY: Palgrave, 152–170.

¹⁵ See Wilderson, Red, White, and Black; Sexton, People-of-Color-Blindness.

¹⁶ Sexton, People-of-Color-Blindness, p. 37.

¹⁷ Hartman, S. 1997. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 6.

¹⁸ Fanon, F. 1970. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Paladin.

¹⁹ Ibid., 9, emphasis added.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

²¹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 21.

²² See Agathangelou, A.M. and L.H.M. Ling, L.H.M. 2009. *World Politics From Empire to Multiple Worlds*. New York, NY and London: Routledge; Mark Anthony Neal, M.A. 2006. It's your Nigger Problem, Not Hip-Hop's. *The New Black Magazine*, December 8. [Online]. Available at: <http://thenewblackmagazine.com/view.aspx?index=737>.

²³ Trask, H. 2002. *Night is a Sharkskin Drum*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

²⁴ Fanon, F. 1967. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 41.

²⁵ Mishra, P. 1999. *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital Age*. Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martins, 182.

²⁶ Powell, C. 2003. Remarks to the United Nations Security Council [Online]. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2003/17300.htm>.

²⁷ Dowd, M. 2003. Powell without Picasso. *New York Times*, 5 February, 1. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/05/opinion/05DOWD.html?scp=2&sq=powell%20without%20picasso&st=cse>

²⁸ Dowd, Powell without Picasso, 1.

²⁹ Laurie Brereton, an Australian MP, said: 'The stranglehold exerted by the powers-that-be is more precarious than it appears at first glance, and the space for intervention—the gap for resistance—lies in these faltering moments. One such gap was filled by the politician-laden Guernica parody; it is a staged protest with wide dissemination at its core... These treatments of Guernica are complex in content and in form: they recast past events in terms of the present; they move from traditional mass media to digital mass media; and they make use of new capabilities for representation and dissemination afforded by digital technologies;' cited in Kuhn, V. 2009. Performing Life. *Enculturation* 6(2). [Online]. Available at: <http://enculturation.gmu.edu/6.2/kuhn>.

³⁰ Amoores, L. 2007. Vigilant Visualities: The Watchful Politics of the War on Terror. *Security Dialogue* 38(2), 218.

³¹ Der Derian, *Virtuous War*, 238.

³² Der Derian, J. 2002. The War of Networks. *Theory and Event* 5(4), 5; emphasis added.

³³ Der Derian, *Virtuous War*; see also Campbell, D. Geopolitics and Visuality: Sighting the Darfur Conflict. *Political Geography* 26(4), 357–382. Campbell traces visibility in humanitarian projects; while he does not theorize race, he speaks of how UK media made a specific Darfur knowable to British audiences.

- ³⁴ Hunt, K. and Rygiel, K. 2006. *(En)Gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- ³⁵ Der Derian, *Virtuous War*, 26.
- ³⁶ Miller, J.H. 2007. Boundaries in Beloved, *Sympleke* 15(1–2), 25.
- ³⁷ Tausig, M. 1997. *Defacement*. San Francisco: Stanford University Press, 3.
- ³⁸ Doane, M.A. 1991. Technology's Body: Cinematic Vision in Modernity. *Differences* 5(2), 32.
- ³⁹ Bush, G.W. 2001. President Unveils 'Most Wanted' Terrorists. [Online]. Available at: <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011010-3.html>.
- ⁴⁰ Williams, L. 2010. Cluster Fuck: The Forcible Frame in Errol Morris's *Standard Operating Procedure*. *Camera Obscura* 25(1), 29–67.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Kochi, T. 2009. *The Other's War: Recognition and the Violence of Ethics*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 15–16.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
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⁸⁵ Agathangelou and Ling, *World Politics*.

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⁹⁹ Chang, *Construction and Export*, 70, emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁰ I am indebted to Kole Kilibarda for this idea.

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¹⁰² Chow, R. 1998. *Ethics after Idealism: Theory, Culture, Ethnicity, and Reading*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 12.

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Chapter 4

Conceptualizing al-Qaeda and US Grand Strategy

Lars Berger

The US debate about the nature of al-Qaeda and the associated threat does not occur in a political or ideological vacuum. In fact, given its on-going political salience, questions such as what al-Qaeda is, how it can be conceptualized and defeated provide a large number of access points for those trying to shape broader US policies and underlying discourses. In the context of Middle East politics, for example, the perception of an on-going terrorist threat allowed some to argue for US policies that take into account Palestinian demands, whilst others stressed the need to uphold a close relationship with the Israeli government and to vigorously pursue the 'national interest'.¹ More recently, the answer to the question of whether al-Qaeda can still be thought of as having a coherent core or whether it simply serves as a brand for essentially local, bottom-up radicalization processes has direct implications for the question of whether the US-led military presence in Afghanistan and the aggressive pursuit of the Taliban should be at the heart of US counterterrorism efforts.² Ultimately, the US debate about al-Qaeda is inextricably linked to specific ontologies of international politics and long-held convictions about the global role which the United States should and can play. That is why the present analysis follows in the footsteps of those who have called for closer attention to be paid to individual perceptions and convictions as the intervening variable between international incentives and policy outcomes.³

Classic accounts of US foreign policy orientations juxtaposed either 'Isolationists' and 'Internationalists' or 'Realists' and 'Idealists'. Wittkopf distinguished not only between Isolationism and Internationalism, but also between a more cooperative multilateral Internationalism and its militant unilateral version.⁴ Further differentiating international approaches, Ross and Posen came up with four ideal type grand strategies – Neo-Isolationism, Selective Engagement, Primacy and Cooperative Security – which they had distilled from their overview of the post-Cold War debate on how the United States should confront challenges to its national security.⁵ These resemble Mead's conceptualization of four ideal-type schools – the Isolationist Jeffersonians, the calculating Hamiltonians, the muscular Jacksonians, and the idealist Wilsonians – which reflect distinct moral values and political views associated with deep-seated regional, economic, and social interests.⁶ This chapter is devoted to an in-depth exploration of what these

different approaches have to say about the nature of the threat al-Qaeda poses, its causes and the policies most likely to safeguard US interests.

The Isolationist Conceptualization of al-Qaeda

Based on a Realist view of international security, neo-isolationists call for a reduction in the presence of the United States as answer to Islamist terrorism. Domestically, Isolationists regard the focus on the defence of the US homeland as a safeguard against the national government from becoming a threat to US democracy.⁷ Some of the leading Isolationist voices point out that by announcing a 'war on terrorism' the Bush administration had essentially pushed the United States into an open-ended war. Because it is difficult if not impossible to define what al-Qaeda is and who its members are, it will remain impossible to define exactly at which point the United States can declare victory. This is problematic because in US history, times of war have always seen the erosion of civil liberties at home.⁸

The isolationist account of al-Qaeda emphasizes either the futility of US engagement abroad in the face of an irrational other or the need to reduce US engagement abroad as a way of cooling the flames of rational objection to perceived US hegemony. The first view found its most prominent recent expression in libertarian Republican Representative Ron Paul's objection to the Iraq war. During a 2007 debate of Republican presidential hopefuls Paul was attacked by Senator John McCain for allegedly failing to grasp the true nature of the national security threat posed by al-Qaeda by calling for an early US withdrawal from Iraq:

If we fail in Iraq, we will see Iraq become a center for al-Qaeda, chaos, genocide in the region, and they'll follow us home. After we lost the war in Vietnam, we came home, they didn't follow us home. You read Zargawi, you read bin Laden, you read al-Qaeda, they'll tell you they want to follow us home.⁹

Ron Paul's defence rested on quoting Ronald Reagan's ultimate assessment of the futility of US engagement in Lebanon:

Ronald Reagan in 1983 sent Marines into Lebanon, and he said he would never turn tail and run. A few months later, the Marines were killed, 241 were killed, and the Marines were taken out. And Reagan addressed this subject in his memoirs. And he says, 'I said I would never turn tail and run.' He says, 'But I never realized the irrationality of Middle Eastern politics,' and he changed his policy there.¹⁰

Paul's version of isolationism features a notion of the irrational other that is incapable or unwilling to appreciate the benevolent nature of US policies. Engagement abroad is thus costly and futile. At first glance, Paul's views seem

to reflect the continuing relevance, at least on the level of political rhetoric coming from a quasi-political outsider, of Orientalist frames. At the same time, Paul's minority position shows that contrary to Edward Said and his disciples,¹¹ Orientalist 'othering' can even serve as the basis for questioning Imperialist projects. However, by focussing on the supposed irrationality of those who attack the United States, this version of isolationist thinking undermines its own argument for withdrawal from international politics. It is only with a rational actor that some sort of mutual non-aggression pact has a chance to survive.

The notion of rationality is central to a more widespread variant of Isolationist sentiment which sees the US involvement in regional conflicts as the main source of frustration and as a central motif of Islamist terrorism. Karabell, for instance, suggested that an appropriately defined set of limited US interests would decrease the likelihood of confrontation with Islamist movements and governments. In the end, Islamism could be as irrelevant for countries outside the broader Muslim world as 'Quebecois nationalism is for Thailand'.¹²

For Neo-Realist Stephen Walt, the United States should pursue a policy of offshore-balancing where the use of force would be reserved for instances of direct and immediate threat as occurred on 11 September 2001. Sharing some isolationist sentiments on these issues he believes that such a reduced (military) footprint would help initiate some sort of virtuous circle where the associated decrease in Anti-American sentiment would make it even less likely that the United States would have to become engaged militarily abroad.¹³

Such sentiments had already featured in some responses to initial US encounters with radical Islamist terrorism during the 1990s. The attack on the World Trade Centre on 23 February 1993 which killed six people and injured more than a thousand was the first attack committed by Islamist terrorists on the US mainland. The debate on its foreign policy implications saw Isolationist and anti-war voices arguing that the attack constituted a 'blowback' from the US support for the Afghan resistance against the Soviet occupation during the 1980s.¹⁴ Andrew Hartman, for instance, claims that the USA in large part created some of the deadliest urban guerrilla warriors in the world – trained to use weapons of modern-day terror.¹⁵ Members of the foreign policy establishment such as Democratic Senator Charles Schumer (NY) and President Reagan's Afghanistan envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, who would later serve as President George W. Bush's ambassador to Kabul and Baghdad, tried to separate the perceived foreign policy success of the 1980s from an emerging threat to US national security.¹⁶ According to then-US ambassador to Pakistan, Robert Oakley, one had to differentiate between Afghan resistance against Soviet troops and the network of Arab fighters.¹⁷ Milton Bearton, a former intelligence professional dealing with Afghanistan, added that the United States and Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia had supported different factions. The United States had not had direct contact with Arab volunteers because it channelled all its support for the Afghan resistance through the Pakistani intelligence service.¹⁸ For Peter Bergen, the CIA was therefore guilty not of too much, but of too little engagement in Afghanistan.¹⁹ Marc Sageman was unable to locate a single Afghan

who had previously trained with Pakistani intelligence with the exception of one close personal friend of Osama bin Laden.²⁰ In his view, the Soviet withdrawal was mostly due to the efforts of US supported Afghan fighters and not the Arab volunteers on the payroll of Arab Gulf regimes:

In summary, the United States indirectly supported the Afghan mujahedin, who did all the fighting, paid dearly for it, and deserved the full credit for their victory over the Soviets. The expatriate contribution to this victory was minimal at best, for they spread dissension among Muslim resistance ranks. Usually, the victors write history. For the Soviet Afghan war, there is no Afghan account, perhaps due to the high illiteracy rate or later developments in Afghanistan. Instead, the foreign bystanders got to write the history. These foreigners expropriated the native Afghan victory over the Soviet Union, created the myth that they had destroyed a superpower by faith alone, and argued that the same fate would lie ahead for the only remaining superpower (...) Thus the global Salafi jihad was able to hijack the Afghan mujahedin victory for its own ends.²¹

The Isolationist account of a purported link between US 'hegemonic' foreign policies and terrorist attacks on US targets is problematic for two interrelated reasons. First, its proponents fail to distinguish between terrorist attacks on civilians globally and guerrilla attacks on military targets in regions with a US military presence.²² Second, in their attempts to find support for the rather tenuous link between Islamist terrorist attacks against Western civilians and US or Western foreign policies towards the wider Muslim world, they ignore the apparent mismatch between the widespread rejection of US or Western policies and the very limited support for such terrorist attacks.²³ Third, US security professionals have pointed out that as long as many societies experience globalization as Americanization, the political retreat of the United States would remain insufficient when not accompanied by economic retreat (Pillar 2001).

Given its continued unpopularity amongst major sections of the US public and foreign policy elite alike it is not surprising that a Council on Foreign Relations initiative led by Lawrence J. Korb did not include Isolationism in a list of possible ways of reacting to the security threats which the United States is facing at the beginning of the 21st century. Instead, it focussed on the options of emphasising US military superiority, of deterrence and containment, as well as of strengthening international institutions and rules.²⁴ These three approaches reflect the other three Grand Strategies outlined above. Their role in understanding and fighting al-Qaeda will be assessed in the following sections.

The Defensive Realist Conceptualization of al-Qaeda

According to the selective engagement approach, foreign policy should pursue a narrower set of policy objectives that focusses on maintaining cooperative

relations with the European Union, Russia, China and Japan and the stability of the international order in general as a way of pursuing US economic interests. For its proponents, the cautious and defensive use of limited government resources becomes even more important in the context of increasing strains put on the US federal budget by retiring baby boomers.²⁵

With their attachment to Realist thinking, adherents of this line of strategic thinking long viewed terrorism only in terms of its links to state sponsors. One classic example is Condoleezza Rice's *Foreign Affairs* article in which President George W. Bush's eventual National Security Adviser and US secretary of state had laid out the Republican foreign policy manifesto for the 2000 Presidential elections. There, she focussed on US relations with Russia and China and discussed terrorism only in the context of the spread of weapons of mass destruction and so-called rogue states.²⁶ Colin Ray makes clear that the Realist scepticism regarding the long-term impact transnational actors such as al-Qaeda can have on the foreign policies of leading powers was not limited to the pre-9/11 era.

It may be worth my mentioning the fact that if the actual (the First and Second World Wars and the Holocaust) and potential (a superpower nuclear Third World War) horrors of the twentieth century failed to effect radical change in the means and methods of world politics, it is hardly likely that isolated terrorist atrocities, no matter how televisual, would succeed in their turn.²⁷

His US colleague Stephen Walt added that the United States could absorb a replay of September 11 once every 10 years and continue to thrive as a society.²⁸

Just like their Isolationist peers, traditional Realists are uncomfortable with the sweeping rhetoric that accompanied the Bush administration's 'war on terror'. Bemoaning the associated tendency to avoid the pragmatic assessment of national interests, Melvyn Leffler sees Bush's sometimes idealist rhetoric as another example of the way US foreign policy makers react when confronted with new and urgent threats. He points out that the Cold War taught a lesson in how a Manichean worldview can easily lead to mistake essentially local and regional struggles (such as nationalism and anti-colonialism) as part of a wider global effort.²⁹ For Michael Desch, American liberalism is to blame for the President Bush stark portrayal of the threat posed by al-Qaeda. He argues that American Liberalism with its emphasis on values views terrorism not simply as a manageable physical threat to the US homeland, but as a fundamental threat to the US way of life. Only American Liberalism would refuse to treat counterterrorism as simply another matter of criminal justice.³⁰

The Realist scepticism towards the notion of a global, transnational threat to US interests translates into unease with President Bush's early statements that declared war on every terrorist group of global reach.³¹ This prompted the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States which was relatively close to the Grand Strategy of selective engagement to remark that '[t]he catastrophic

threat at this moment in history is more specific. It is the threat posed by Islamist terrorism – especially the al-Qaeda network, its affiliates, and its ideology.³²

Daniel Byman pointed out that the United States had to be careful in devising policies that addressed the fact that some Islamist insurgencies constitute important sources of recruits and public support for al-Qaeda without falling into the trap of ‘chain-ganging’ by getting involved in conflicts where governments have overblown rather tenuous or originally none-existing links with al-Qaeda.³³ In an attempt to illustrate the associated danger, John Mueller quotes bin Laden’s 2004 videotape where the latter claimed that it is ‘easy for us to provoke and bait ... All that we have to do is to send two mujahidin ... to raise a piece of cloth on which is written al-Qaeda in order to make the generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic, and political losses.’³⁴ David Kilcullen, an influential commentator on counterinsurgency whose reflections on Western military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq enjoy widespread attention amongst US policymakers and the interested public, thus called for a policy of ‘disaggregation’ which would delink the numerous insurgencies that are taking place for various reasons across the Muslim world.³⁵ For adherents of limited foreign engagement, the war on terror is thus best pursuit through regional proxies that bear the brunt of tackling the challenge of actors such al-Qaeda. As Posen explained,

Allied military and police forces are more appropriate instruments to apprehend terrorists operating within their national borders than are U.S. forces. They have information that the United States may not have, and they know the territory and people better. The odds of finding the adversary and avoiding collateral damage increase to the extent that the ‘host’ nation-state does the hard work. Moreover, host states can deal better politically with any collateral damage - that is, accidental destruction of civilian life and property.³⁶

Another feature of cautious Realist thinking is the idea that deterrence as a tool of national security also applies to the fight against al-Qaeda. Elbridge A. Colby, who had served in the office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, suggested broadening the notion of deterrence beyond the oftentimes hardly to deter terrorists to include those individuals, governments, or other entities whose material support, cooperation, complicity, or gross negligence enabled an attack.³⁷

The problem with extended deterrence is the question of its credibility and the political fall-out from the private and public statements which this approach requires. One example of this was the public uproar associated with former Pakistani President Musharraf’s assertion that after 9/11, Richard Armitage, Colin Powell’s Deputy Secretary of State, had threatened to bomb Pakistan back into the Stone Age if Musharraf refused to join the war on terror.³⁸ Such private communication marked the backdrop to one of President Bush’s most quoted

statements of US counterterrorism policy. In his speech to a joint session of Congress on 20 September 2001, he declared:

We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.³⁹

Whilst conventional treatments of this statement put it in the context of the Bush administration's penchant for the rhetoric of primacy, it can also be read as a statement of deterrence which the much more pragmatic selective engagement approach would emphasize. As the sentences leading up to the 'with us or against us' remark indicate, the Bush administration was not simply repeating Manichean dichotomies about good and evil. Instead it tried to send a message to active and passive sponsors of terrorism that the new threat of transnational terrorism would make the United States less tolerant of possible cross-fertilizations in terms of expertise and weapons between locally and regionally operating terrorist groups and the global, anti-Western al-Qaeda. In fact, supporters of a more hard-line approach were shocked by what they saw as an offer of amnesty ('From this day forwards') for traditional state sponsors such as Syrian, Iran and Sudan.⁴⁰ Jonathan Stevenson disagreed: 'Constructive but cautious engagement with lesser evils – be they terrorist groups or their suspected state sponsors – is a price worth paying for the capacity to confront the greater evil without quarter.'⁴¹

The Offensive Realist Conceptualization of al-Qaeda

The post-9/11 emphasis on military means in combating international terrorism was widely hailed by those who favour the 'Jacksonian' Grand strategy of primacy. The reliance on military means and the scepticism towards international organizations makes this approach the one with the lowest approval rating amongst international audiences. Its inherently populist outlook, however, explains its popularity amongst segments of the White Protestant US middle class and thus helps to generate important domestic support for US international engagement.⁴²

The administration of George W. Bush was not the first to use military means as an instrument of unilateral counterterrorism policies. In 1986, President Ronald Reagan, declared:

For us to ignore, by inaction, the slaughter of American civilians and American soldiers, whether in night clubs or airline terminals, is simply not in the American tradition. When our citizens are abused or attacked, anywhere in the world, on the direct orders of a hostile regime – we will respond (...) I warned that there

should be no place on Earth where terrorists can rest and train and practice their deadly skills. I meant it. I said that we would act with others if possible, and alone if necessary, to ensure that terrorists have no sanctuary anywhere.⁴³

President Reagan's statements on the terrorist threat and its possible linkage to 'state sponsors' offer some striking resemblance to the rhetoric of the George W. Bush administration. Specifically, he blamed the rise of international terrorist attacks during the 1980s on a 'confederation of terrorist states' bound together by a shared 'fanatical hatred' of the American way of life.⁴⁴ This confederation consisted of Iran and North Korea (which would join Iraq in an axis of evil in early 2002) as well as Libya, Cuba and Nicaragua. Because the terrorist attacks committed and commissioned by these states would constitute acts of war, the United States had the right to defend itself.⁴⁵

The Clinton administration had to confront the fact that with the rise of al-Qaeda the role of state sponsors began to diminish. For many US officials the almost co-temporary attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania which killed 224 people including 12 US. Americans in August 1998 constituted a turning point in the struggle with Islamist terrorism.⁴⁶ Just like the Bush administration after 9/11, the Clinton administration framed the bombings as armed attacks which would grant the United States the right to defend itself in accordance with article 51 of the United Nations charter.⁴⁷ Secretaries Cohen and Albright pointed out that Osama bin Laden had issued a declaration of war in early 1998 which would suffice in making him a legitimate military target.⁴⁸ A couple of months after the US missile strikes on al-Qaeda's Afghan training camps, government sources confirmed that the goal had been to kill Osama bin Laden. At first glance this seemed to have constituted a violation of President Ford's 1976 executive order which banned the US government from engaging in assassinations in light of the CIA's previous involvement in many Third World countries. According to White House lawyers, however, the President was still permitted to attack the 'infrastructure' of terrorist groups. When the infrastructure of transnational organizations of the type of al-Qaeda mainly consists of their members than these members themselves would become legitimate targets.⁴⁹

Through its decision to phrase the campaign against the transnational al-Qaeda and its affiliates as war, the Bush administration suggested to the US public that military confrontations with other states would dominate.⁵⁰ This was made clear by Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz's announcement that the war on terror could also mean ending states who sponsor terrorism.⁵¹ This approach was applauded by neoconservative commentators such as Charles Krauthammer who declared that the war on terror could not be over until Saddam Hussein's regime was gone and the governments in Tehran and Damascus had stopped their sponsorship of international terrorism: 'After Afghanistan, we turn to Damascus. What then? Stage three is Iraq and Iran (...) All we do know is that victory, cunning and cruel, will demand that if this president wants victory in the war he has declared, he will have to achieve it on the very spot where is own father, 10 years ago, let victory

slip away.⁵² In fact, in December 2001, 61 per cent of US. Americans agreed that as long as Saddam Hussein was in power the war on terrorism could not be viewed as successful.⁵³

Many observers either share Widmaier's view that President Bush's rhetoric should be seen as an attempt to galvanize an otherwise reluctant (or even isolationist) public to support the international engagement political elites deemed necessary in safeguarding US national interests or Flibbert's focus on the central role of specific ideologies and the individuals who espouse them.⁵⁴ Such assessments, however, tend to ignore the intensely political context of the 'war on terror'. In fact, there is substantial evidence to argue that the Bush administration's escalating focus on Iraq in the early summer of 2002 sought to address the inevitable post-9/11 slide in polls. Previous experiences with international terrorism have shown that US policymakers cannot rely on the enduring benefits of a rally-around-the-flag effect.⁵⁵ Kam and Ramos have shown that whilst events such as 9/11 help to link national identity with presidential approval, the long-term impact is limited.⁵⁶ They therefore suggest that President Bush's attempt to shift the emphasis from al-Qaeda to other threats such as Iraq constituted an effort to sustain the rally in his approval ratings which was strongly tied to a post-9/11 surge in patriotism. By framing counterterrorism in terms of war against a militarily inferior enemy the Bush administration increased the chances of war-like victories that are better for media consumption than clandestine work.⁵⁷ This strategy aimed to tap into American patriotism and nationalism in much the same way as previous administrations had done during the war against Spain in 1898, the two world wars and the Cold War.⁵⁸ In order to make the accompanying rhetoric more convincing, the notion of terrorist attacks with weapons of mass destruction had to take centre-stage.

President Bush laid the rhetorical foundation for the unfolding march to war in his 2002 state of the union speech where he declared: 'First we shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And, second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the World'.⁵⁹ Around the same time, George W. Bush's advisor Karl Rove told a party gathering: 'Americans trust the Republicans to do a better job of keeping our communities and our families safe. We can also go to the country on this issue because they trust the Republican Party to do a better job of protecting and strengthening America's military might and thereby protecting America'.⁶⁰ By shifting the emphasis more clearly on Iraq, President Bush could hope to regain the political initiative on the ever-important issue of how to fight the terrorist threat. In his West Point speech in June 2002 President Bush insisted that deterrence does not work against terrorists and their state sponsors: 'Deterrence, the promise of massive retaliation against nations, means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend'.⁶¹ He also pledged that the US would 'defend peace against threats from terrorists and tyrants'. Aside from the alliteration which always works nicely in speeches,⁶² this quote is part of a long-term effort to link the emerging threat of Islamist terrorism with the old threat of rogues states. Despite the CIA having

received only two days before information from a cabinet-level Iraqi official that Saddam Hussein had no previous or current ties with Osama bin Laden, President Bush stated on 25 September 2002 that

Al-Qaeda hides. Saddam doesn't, but the danger is, that they work in concert. The danger is, that al-Qaeda becomes an extension of Saddam's madness and his hatred and his capacity to extend weapons of mass destruction around the world. ...[Y]ou can't distinguish between al-Qaeda and Saddam when you talk about the war on terror.⁶³

The US foreign policy establishment was very sceptical about claims that rational dictators would risk a US attack by giving weapons of mass destruction to terrorists. President George W.H. Bush's national security adviser, Bent Scowcroft, concluded that '(t)he most military part of this campaign may already be over. It is my sense that not many states are likely to volunteer to be the next Taliban.'⁶⁴ Walt also rejected the link between rogue states and terrorism as overblown: No foreign government is going to give up the weapons they need for deterrence and allow them to be used in ways that would place their own survival at risk.⁶⁵ He and fellow Neo-Realist John Mearsheimer were clear in their view that Iraq could be contained.⁶⁶ As Arreguín-Toft explained:

The reason why WMD terrorism proved to be so valuable as a post-Cold War bogeyman was that the idealised WMD terrorist both maintained a state-like capacity to harm and the possibility of invoking a principle of responsibility for any state theoretically involved in providing terrorists with the means to execute such an attack.⁶⁷

In October 2005, President Bush used a speech at the National Endowment for Democracy where he presented his administration's interpretation of what al-Qaeda constitutes that moved beyond the general descriptions offered in the 2002 National Security Strategy or the 2003 National Strategy on Combating Terrorism.⁶⁸ Whereas his pronouncements in the lead-up to the Iraq war were dominated by warnings over the threat of weapons of mass destruction, President Bush now focussed on transnational Islamist terrorism and al-Qaeda. Setting aside possible or real differences of the organizations involved, he raised the spectre of a broader Islamist movement aiming to end US and Western influence in the wider Middle East: 'Their tactic to meet this goal has been consistent for a quarter-century: They hit us, and expect us to run. They want us to repeat the sad history of Beirut in 1983, and Mogadishu in 1993—only this time on a larger scale, with greater consequences.'⁶⁹

Whilst he differentiated between global, borderless terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda that facilitates the activities of local groups and conducts the most spectacular attacks itself, and regional groups in Somalia, the Philippines, Pakistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, and Algeria and local cells that are not centrally

directed, President Bush claimed that they all agreed on a fanatic and extreme plan to create a radical Islamic empire that stretches from Spain to Indonesia. With greater economic and military and political power, the terrorists would be able to advance their stated agenda: 'to develop weapons of mass destruction, to destroy Israel, to intimidate Europe, to assault the American people, and to blackmail our government into isolation.'⁷⁰

Bush's portrayal of al-Qaeda closely mirrors the description provided by his former speech-writer David Frum and leading Neo-Conservative Richard Perle. In their neo-conservative manifesto about how to win the so-called global war on terror, Frum and Perle warn: 'A radical strain of Islam has declared war on us ... All the available evidence suggests that militant Islam commands wide support, and even wider sympathy, amongst Muslims worldwide, including Muslim minorities in the West ... In militant Islam, we face an aggressive ideology of world domination.'⁷¹ Frum and Perle also move the transnational al-Qaeda closer to the long-established category of nation-states: 'al-Qaeda could never have achieved its murderous effectiveness if the governments of the Middle East had all been hostile to it. (...) The nexus between the terror groups and the terror states is a dangerous reality.'⁷²

President Bush's 2005 speech shows how the inability or unwillingness to leave behind traditional notions of power and international politics brings about a tendency to reify al-Qaeda by ascribing it quasi-state-like attributes such as the ability to inflict catastrophic damage and a hierarchical, top-down organization with an executive on top that just like the other madmen Hitler and Stalin before harbours expansionist schemes. This last aspect is indicative of this approach's ambiguous view on al-Qaeda's rationality. On the one hand, notions of irrationality are used to construct the image of an immediate uncontrollable threat. At the same time, however, Dick Cheney and others emphasize that al-Qaeda has learned from a history of perceived US weakness and feebleness in the face of terrorist provocations. Such ability to learn from the behaviour of others and adopt one's own strategies accordingly depends, however, on a level of rationality which the Bush administration claimed al-Qaeda does not possess.

The Liberal Conceptualization of al-Qaeda

The Wilsonian grand strategy of cooperative security sets itself apart by being the only one of the four outlined here that is informed by liberal thinking on international security. It views international cooperation and the use of soft power as the most cost-effective ways of promoting US interests in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.⁷³ For Joseph Nye who coined the concept of soft power, world politics is changing in a way that means Americans cannot achieve all of their international goals acting alone.⁷⁴ In this view, irrespective of its exact nature as an organization, network or movement, the rise of al-Qaeda highlights the need

to adopt new security policies that address the new threats of a globalized world. As the authors of the 9/11 Commission Report made clear,

9/11 taught us that terrorism against American interests ‘over there’ should be regarded just as we regard terrorism against American ‘over there’. In this sense, the American homeland is the planet.⁷⁵

The extent to which US counterterrorism policy could be rebalanced away from the emphasis on military means, towards an intelligence and criminal justice approach supported by friends and allies around the world, depends to a not inconsiderable extent on the answer which policy-makers accept about the current nature of the terrorist threat. On one side of the debate, Marc Sageman argued that al-Qaeda had evolved into less than a formal organization and advanced what was referred to as a bottom-up view of al-Qaeda with a multitude of informal local groups trying to emulate their predecessors by conceiving and executing operations from the bottom up now posing the main threat.⁷⁶ By 2006, the official assessment of al-Qaeda had also moved towards questioning the existence of a coherent core. That year’s National Intelligence Estimate on Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States claimed that United States-led counterterrorism efforts had seriously damaged the leadership of al-Qaeda and disrupted its operations.⁷⁷ At the same time, it acknowledged that such successes occurred against a global jihadist movement – which includes al-Qaeda, affiliated and independent terrorist groups, and emerging networks and cells that spread and adapt to counterterrorism efforts. It also warned that this global jihadist movement is decentralized, ‘lacks a coherent global strategy, and is becoming more diffuse. New jihadist networks and cells, with anti-American agendas, are increasingly likely to emerge.’⁷⁸ Richard Barrett, coordinator of the UN al-Qaida and Taliban Sanctions Committee Monitoring Team, concurred: ‘the whole presentation of al-Qaeda as an international movement with groups acting in concert all over the world – that, too, has deteriorated. They’ve not been able to sustain that image in the short term. And most of the targets for terrorist groups are now essentially local, and they are no longer so obviously linked to some sort of global agenda.’⁷⁹

This has obvious policy implications. Matthew and Shambaugh, for instance, point out that whilst networks are very resistant in their ability to absorb external shocks and disruptions; collective action problems inherent in their set-up will make it ‘extraordinarily unlikely’ for terrorists to ‘undermine the national or homeland security of countries.’⁸⁰ They point out that whilst the network structure provides ‘vulnerability interdependence’ insofar as other nodes might take over functions from those under attack, ‘sensitivity interdependence’ means that individual nodes are always more sensitive to attacks against other parts of the network.⁸¹ Such weaknesses mean that attributing a high level of unity and capacity to al-Qaeda is misleading and runs the risk of wasting resources fighting on enemy that does not exist in the form imagined.⁸²

More sceptical observers point out that the 1990s assumption that the international terrorist scene had splintered into ever smaller autonomous cells was one of the reasons why intelligence experts had missed their interaction and cooperation that had occurred under the banner of al-Qaeda.⁸³ Peter Bergen, Bruce Riedel and Bruce Hoffman are thus all more concerned about what they view as al-Qaeda's reconstituted operational abilities.⁸⁴ Bergen rejects Marc Sageman's notion of leaderless jihad which would be unable to mount a serious threat to US security.⁸⁵ For Bruce Hoffman the only conclusion which can be drawn is that '(t)he United States and its allies must refocus their attention on Afghanistan and Pakistan, where al-Qaeda began to collapse after 9/11 but has now regrouped.'⁸⁶

The notion of a resurgent al-Qaeda featured prominently in Barack Obama's efforts to undermine the national security credentials of his Republican opponent, John McCain, during the 2008 presidential election. During their first presidential debate Obama attacked McCain for supporting the war in Iraq which constituted an unnecessary distraction.⁸⁷ Instead he urged a change of focus to Afghanistan and Pakistan. His running-mate Joe Biden warned accordingly: 'I promise you, if an attack comes in the homeland, it's going to come as our security services have said, it is going to come from al-Qaeda planning in the hills of Afghanistan and Pakistan. That's where they live. That's where they are. That's where it will come from.'⁸⁸ For observers like Bergen the operative threat is posed by those individuals below the immediate leadership whose involvement in the planning of attacks makes their arrest or targeted killing paramount.⁸⁹ Reflecting increasing concerns about the influence of these operatives, the Obama Administration has dramatically increased the use of drones for targeted killings. Whereas the Bush Administration only made use of this instrument nine times in the years 2004 to 2007 and 34 times in its last year office, the Obama Administration conducted 53 such strikes in 2009, 118 in 2010, and 70 in 2012.⁹⁰ In its greater willingness to employ military means in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, the Obama administration followed the call to pay close attention to failed states as the global terrorist network's equivalent of an international business's corporate headquarters, providing concrete locations, or stable 'nodes', in which to situate their factories, training facilities, and storehouses.⁹¹

In August 2009, John Brennan, Barack Obama's National Security Adviser for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, began to outline the Obama administration's take on the terrorist threat to the United States. First, the US government relegated counterterrorism from a level where Brennan saw it as 'defining – indeed, distorting – our entire national security and foreign policy to where it is just one part of larger policies.' This goes hand in hand with, second, a redefinition of the enemy. Brennan took particular issue with the Bush administration's emphasis on waging war against terrorism. For the Obama administration, the enemy was not terrorism per se, but al-Qaeda. Its description as a global jihadi effort was dropped because it lent credibility and religious legitimacy to a small number of people who are expressing a worldview of very limited appeal to the broader Muslim public.⁹² This follows a theme established in

Obama's inauguration speech in which he offered 'a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect' to the Muslim World.⁹³

In the end, the Obama-Administration's approach seems torn between the inclination to relegate the terrorist threat to one amongst many other global challenges and the need to take the necessary precautions against another attack by individuals more or less closely associated with al-Qaeda. In the context of the ongoing debate amongst academics and counterterrorism professionals about the exact nature of al-Qaeda, the aggressive pursuit of mid- and high-level operatives affiliated with al-Qaeda and the wider network reflects the (re-emerging) notion of al-Qaeda as coherent entity with the ability to devise and conduct terrorist attacks.

Conclusion

Each of the grand strategies presented here offered very specific assessments of the nature of the threat posed by al-Qaeda and the policies required to address it. The isolationist account of al-Qaeda emphasizes either the futility of US engagement abroad in the face of an irrational other or the need to reduce US engagement abroad as a way of cooling the flames of rational objection to perceived US hegemony. The isolationist account faces the problem of a rather overwhelming elite and public consensus in favour of maintaining strong US links with the rest of the world. Yet, this lack of influence on a policy-making level has not prevented some of its favourite arguments such as the argument about the link between the rejection of specific US policies and the rise of Islamist terrorist attacks on US civilians from becoming ingrained in mainstream journalistic and academic discourses supported by those whose proposals are shaped by defensive Realist or liberal world views.

The benefits of a defensive Realist approach are evidently linked to the fact that its focus on great power relations and its scepticism regarding the long-term threat posed by al-Qaeda make its adherents less likely to step into the trap of over-reaction which lies at the heart of the terrorist calculus. Based on Realist ontologies of international politics, the adherents of the grand strategies of Isolationism and selective engagement are more concerned about the costs involved in misguided US policies than in the, in this view, essentially manageable threat posed by al-Qaeda. Their respective policy recommendations depend on the rationality of al-Qaeda members and sympathizers who are expected to be swayed by a possible re-orientation of US policies. At the same time, both approaches remain indifferent to policies that seek to address the rise of organizations such as al-Qaeda by tackling the lack of political freedom in large swaths of the Muslim world and the authoritarian political structures which until the Arab Spring nurtured Anti-Western discourses as a way of delegitimizing liberal calls for reform.⁹⁴

Much ink has been spilled over the highly controversial grand strategy of primacy. The tendency to blur the lines between combating al-Qaeda and tackling the issue of state sponsorship of terrorism has served the Bush administration

well in attempts to extend the post 9/11 rally far beyond historic timeframes. The image of a coherent, hierarchical organization features most prominently in this approach. By constructing al-Qaeda as a quasi-state, the supporters of this grand strategy are redefining the object of US policies in such a way as to make conventional, military tools seem appropriate.

With their particular sensitivity to the chances and risks associated with globalization liberal approaches appear, at the first glance, most at ease with the notion of a networked or only weakly structured phenomenon. The on-going debate in US policy and academic circles about the essence of al-Qaeda as either a bottom-up movement of loosely affiliated like-minded individuals or a top-down organization has broader implications for US counterterrorism policies. The less coherent an entity al-Qaeda is the more appropriate traditional criminal justice approaches are. The Obama-Administration's escalation of drone and Special Forces attacks on perceived al-Qaeda leaders and planers in South Asia, the Middle East and East Africa reflect an on-going wariness with regard to the existence of a coherent organization that is capable of threatening the United States.

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Chapter 5

Measuring al-Qaeda: The Metrics of Terror

Rashmi Singh

On 11 September 2001, three hijacked airplanes crashed into key strategic and symbolic targets in the United States: two into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City and one into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. A fourth one that was en route to Washington DC, crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. In response, the Bush Administration launched the Global War on Terror (GWOt) by bombing Afghanistan in order to target al-Qaeda (AQ) and its Taliban hosts. By 2003 the military campaign had expanded to include Iraq, which was not only portrayed as harbouring and supporting AQ but, through machinations of astonishing discursive duplicity, also threatening the United States and its allies with weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Yet despite multiple assertions that AQ and its allies were on the run and the United States (US) making gains in the GWOt, in 2003 then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld questioned if the US was winning or losing the war on terror, asserting: 'Today, we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror.'¹

This statement raises a series of pertinent questions. For one, are there really no metrics to measure US success and failure in the GWOt? If not, what accounts for such an absence? Why are such metrics important in the first place? Can we really generate reliable and accurate metrics to assess progress in the field of terrorism/counter-terrorism and by logical extension the GWOt? If so, what are some salient methodological and epistemological difficulties and issues encountered when attempting to generate such metrics? Finally, and perhaps more crucially, what exactly do metrics employed to study a social phenomenon measure, signify and represent?

This chapter seeks to engage with these questions by first locating and identifying some metrics that have been commonly used by the US government to gauge its own success and failure in the GWOt. Having supplied this background, I then engage with the specific constructions of the US and AQ that these metrics divulge. What emerges from such an engagement is the understanding that all metrics possess an intrinsically dual nature; i.e., not only do metrics, regardless of their limitations, reflect a genuine attempt to generate some sort of standard measure to assess performance in a particular area but they also simultaneously represent the socio-political, cultural worldviews and ambitions of the actor(s) producing them. In our particular case, the metrics generated by the US government to assess its performance against AQ not only reveal the United States' temporal and spatial location and ambitions but also effectively generate a very particular

understanding of the adversary (i.e. AQ and transnational terrorism). Hence, AQ and transnational terrorism both become very specific entities within the metrics deployed to measure progress in the battle being waged against them. Consequently, these metrics reveal as much, if not more, about the nature of the US as they do about AQ.

US Metrics of Success and Failure in the GWoT

Developing metrics, i.e. standard measures to assess performance in a given field, is by no means a novelty. Evaluative research is designed specifically to generate tools that can determine if a particular policy or program is effective or not.² However, evaluative research, which is problematic enough when directed toward assessing a constantly shifting social reality, becomes even more challenging when applied to the field of terrorism. Producing metrics to assess the success or failure of a counter-terrorism campaign is a complicated task because the concepts of victory/success and defeat/failure are incredibly problematic to define and delineate in the context of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Victory in traditional warfare is comparatively much easier to gauge.³ In a traditional confrontation between two standing armies success is typically determined on the basis of territory won, the quantity of enemy weaponry and ranks decimated, infrastructure destroyed and so on. Of course, some experts argue that these indicators alone are not enough to establish success even in a traditional war. Bobbitt argues that victory for a nation-state even in traditional confrontations is not simply the enemy's defeat, as gauged by the indicators detailed above, but crucially the achievement of the war aim. This is complicated because a state's war aims are founded upon its changing constitutional and strategic circumstances and so the notion of victory also shifts with time.⁴

But even these problematic indicators fall dismally short when applied to counter-terrorism. For example, while in traditional confrontations the destruction of armed forces and military equipment can be, and have been, used as reliable indicators of success, in the case of counter-terrorism, 'the eradication of terrorist cells, decapitation of terrorist leadership, blocking of terrorist funds or the destruction of terrorist safe havens does not necessarily (and, in fact, rarely) result in the cessation of terrorist violence.'⁵ The damage caused by terrorism is also harder to estimate and the differences in time periods over which terrorist threats exist also serves to further complicate the estimation of success in counter-terrorism campaigns. Probst highlights how various other traditional measures are also much more problematic when applied in the context of counter-terrorism. Thus, statistics outlining the number of terrorists killed are problematic as there is often little knowledge about how large a particular terrorist group is in the first place. Similarly, there can be multiple reasons why terrorist attacks abate. Groups may use the lull for further 'training, recruitment and arms procurement,' to gather 'for a massive onslaught' or to trick 'a government into a false sense of security.'⁶

On the basis of the above, one can begin to understand both why reliable and accurate metrics are necessary to assess progress in the GWoT and also why their generation is so problematic. Despite recognizing that such measures are necessary the US government has, to date, been unable to produce a set of comprehensive, systematic and consistent metrics to assess its performance in the GWoT. While it would be an overstatement to suggest that the US government has made no attempts to gauge its performance in the GWoT, yet often, assessments of success can only be gleaned from the political statements and speeches made by George W. Bush and other government officials, who tend to echo the President's remarks. Bush's assertions of success, in turn, seem to be more reflective of his administration's strategic policies and ambitions rather than the ground realities of the GWoT. These statements repeatedly underscore US successes against AQ and its affiliates and progressively frame and define the nature of the global terrorist threat. President Bush's State of the Union Speeches provide a prime example:

In four short months, our nation has ... rallied a great coalition, captured, arrested, and rid the world of thousands of terrorists, destroyed Afghanistan's terrorist training camps, saved a people from starvation, and freed a country from brutal oppression ... [Thanks to our troops] *we are winning the war on terror* [my emphasis] ... First, we will shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And, second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world⁷

As is evident from this example, none of these statements were definite and/or unproblematic; neither were they quantifiable or comparable measures of success. Yet, it is worth noting, that the strategic ambitions outlined in these statements came to be systematically enshrined in various national strategy documents produced during the Bush presidency. Once incorporated into national strategy these ambitions were consistently bolstered and reproduced in subsequent statements made by President Bush and other high-level officials on the one hand, and strategic policy papers produced by various US government agencies on the other. What resulted was a self-referential cycle of statements and strategic policies that were no more than unsubstantiated assertions of progress.

Despite these drawbacks, the concerns and ambitions outlined in these statements and strategy documents came to be directly echoed in the more deliberately formulated scorecards produced by various departments of the US government. These rare scorecards purported to present the only structured, scientific appraisal of America's performance in GWoT to its public and key allies. Yet, in corresponding so closely with political statements, these scorecards metamorphosed into no more than structured voice pieces for presenting targeted messages disseminated by the Bush administration to influence and shape public opinion. In other words, instead of establishing independent, empirically grounded metrics that would provide an impartial assessment of the GWoT these scorecards,

by default, did no more than offer a limited and partisan evaluation of America's performance against AQ. Furthermore, the scorecards produced by various government agencies also lacked common criteria for measuring US performance. While this is not surprising, given the very specific remits and jurisdictions of different departments, it did contribute toward disparities in how success/failure was measured across various departments.

Despite such formidable handicaps, the statements, national strategy documents and scorecards produced under the Bush administration still reveal a set of nascent metrics. These metrics may be inconsistent, imprecise and 'bare-boned' nevertheless they *do* exist. The indicators measuring US performance both increased and evolved as the GWOt progressed. This evolution reflected the United States' expanding foreign policy interests and built upon concerns outlined in other metrics tracking progress against transnational terrorism. As such, a number of these metrics reflect considerable overlap. Further, when studied closely, these metrics clearly reveal a thematic structure that formed the criteria for assessing US progress. Elements of these themes tend to be first introduced in political statements, then incorporated into national strategy before, finally, being applied as formal 'measures' in the few scorecards that exist.

(a) Body-count

A quantitative 'body-count' approach is perhaps the most commonly used mechanism to gauge success in the GWOt and has been repeatedly used by various departments in the US state machinery. It is on the basis of such figures that Attorney General John Ashcroft unabashedly claimed, 'We are winning the war on terrorism,'⁸ while the Department of Justice (DoJ) asserted that the US was winning the GWOt 'with unrelenting force and unprecedented cooperation.'⁹ The DoJ's report, in fact, listed a number of figures evidencing US successes in the confrontation with AQ, including: the identification and disruption over 100 terrorist threats and cells; the capturing or killing of more than half of al-Qaeda's known senior leadership around the world; the incapacitation more than 3,000 operatives; the breaking-up of four terrorist cells in Buffalo, Detroit, Seattle, and Portland; the identification of hundreds of suspected terrorists across the United States; and the freezing of \$133 million in assets around the world.¹⁰ The same report also emphasized 'success' by citing not only how 132 individuals had already been 'convicted or pleaded guilty in the United States' but also how 'over 515 individuals linked to the September 11 investigation had been deported from the' homeland.¹¹

The Department of Defense (DoD) similarly listed US successes by outlining how it had: 'Liberated more than 50 million Afghans from despotism, terrorism and dictatorship; Conducted attacks against the al Qaeda terrorist network, resulting in the death or incarceration of the majority of its top leadership [and] [w]orked with a global coalition of over 75 countries participating in the GWOt.'¹² Yet, as these examples illustrate, reports applying a body-count approach not only

reflect the absence of a standard set metrics to measure performance in the GWoT across different departments of the US government, but in tending to look at the gains of one side without comparing them with those of the other, paint a partial and potentially inaccurate picture. Therefore, even though ‘body-count’ tends to be the most commonly used method of demonstrating US progress in the GWoT, it has severe shortcomings.

(b) Restricting the geographical reach of AQ and transnational terrorism

The geographical reach of AQ and its affiliates seems to be another core indicator used to define US performance in the GWoT. US documents tend to portray AQ as an enemy with global ambitions, unrestricted by national or regional boundaries. AQ sees the ‘entire world as a battlefield’¹³ and hence becomes an aggressor against ‘civilization’ as a whole. Thus, every international success against AQ is only a reminder of the organization’s ‘shoreless ambitions.’¹⁴ Success under this indicator becomes dependent upon limiting the territorial scope of AQ’s ambitions and operations. Thus, success is gauged on the basis of the number of territories, globally, that are purged of AQ and its influence through offshore action undertaken by American and allied forces. This particular metric of success is tied in very closely to two additional indicators, i.e. the eradication/defeat of AQ and the removal of rogue regimes (see below).

(c) Defeating AQ: A battle of arms and ideas

Successfully neutralizing the transnational terrorist threat is yet another metric of success in the GWoT. From the very beginning, US progress was measured not only on the basis of defeating AQ but also all other groups of global reach and ambitions. In late 2001, President Bush outlined this as a critical parameter of US success when he declared: ‘[o]ur war on terror begins with Al Qaida, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.’¹⁵ Later Bush expanded the geographical scope of the GWoT by stressing that the war would be ‘fought wherever terrorists hide, or run, or plan’¹⁶ and stressing, ‘we’re going to root out terror wherever it may exist.’¹⁷

Hence, priority was given to US military action that sought to disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations of global reach, their leadership, their command, control and communication structures, their material support and finances, in order to disable ‘the terrorist’s ability to plan and operate.’¹⁸ US progress was therefore first judged on the basis of how successfully it tracked down, captured and killed what was seen as a ‘hard-core among ... terrorist enemies ... [who could not] be reformed or deterred.’¹⁹ Progress was also gauged on the basis of how successfully terrorist organizations were denied the funding and weapons needed to conduct attacks against the United States and its allies.

The GWoT also had an ideological component, the so-called ‘battle of ideas’, which sought to delegitimize the use of terrorism and ensure that ‘the conditions and ideologies that promote terrorism do not find fertile ground in any nation.’²⁰ This ideological battle sought to weaken the underlying conditions that terrorists exploited ‘in areas most at risk, and to kindle the hopes and aspirations of freedom in those societies ruled by sponsors of terrorism.’²¹ Now US performance was assessed on the basis of how successfully it accomplished these set goals. This particular measure also came to incorporate aspects of state building and democracy promotion (both developed further below). Hence, as the strategy to defeat AQ involved both a ‘battle of arms and a battle of ideas’²² US success came to be gauged on the basis of successful military action as well as how effectively it confronted the radical ideologies that inspired others to join or support terrorist movements.

(d) The control of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)

Another key metric used to determine success against AQ was the ability of the United States to deny these groups access to WMDs. WMDs, in this context, encompass chemical, biological, radiological weapons as well as nuclear technology and fissile material (henceforth CBRNs). AQ’s desire to access and use CBRNs against the ‘West’ is repeatedly stressed in statements and national strategy documents. Given the ever-present and imminent nature of this threat and AQ’s repeated efforts to access such weapons, forging international partnerships and establishing domestic institutions to implement strategies that prevented WMD proliferation, become key measures of success in the GWoT. Yet other measures of success included: denying terrorists access to material, expertise and other enabling capabilities necessary to develop WMDs; deterring terrorist organizations from employing WMDs; detecting and disrupting terrorist endeavors to move WMD-related materials, weapons and personnel and; preventing and responding to a WMD-related terrorist attack.²³ Thus, United States’ strategy to combat the WMD threat encompassed proactive counter-proliferation efforts, denying rogue states and terrorists access to the materials, technologies and expertise necessary to construct WMDs and ‘effective consequence management to respond to the effects of WMD use’ by terrorists or hostile states.²⁴ Shutting down the Pakistani nuclear black market network that supplied sensitive centrifuge technology and weapon parts to North Korea, Iran and Libya is cited as a key instance of US success. The deliberate coupling of what were previously two separate issues, i.e. terrorism and WMD proliferation, is also underscored as a US success:

*Before 9/11, terrorism and WMD proliferation were treated largely as separate concerns. Today, we have a comprehensive strategy to combat WMD terrorism with domestic institutions to support its implementation, bolstered by an international framework...and strategic partnerships.*²⁵

The control of WMDs is also deliberately tethered to, at least, two additional indicators in the GWoT, i.e. neutralizing rogue regimes and safeguarding the American homeland.

(e) Neutralizing so-called 'rogue regimes'

Neutralizing so-called rogue regimes, such as the one led by Saddam Hussein in Iraq, is a crucial metric of US success. These regimes, as state sponsors of terrorism, were threats to US security as they not only provided funding and weapons to terrorist organizations but also offered territorial 'safe-havens' where such groups could train, rest, plan and conduct operations against the American homeland, its interests abroad and its allies. 'Outlaw regimes'²⁶ like Iraq are described as characteristically brutalizing their own citizens and, in doing so, further compounding conditions of domestic, regional and international instability (further developed under the theme of 'democratization' below). Weak or failing states, such as Afghanistan, were also viewed as potential safe-havens and, as such, a threat to US security as terrorists could 'gain access to ill-governed, or under-governed spaces within states that lack effective control over their own territory.'²⁷ The nexus between transnational terrorists and rogue regimes, that either possessed or sought WMD technology, was viewed as an even more urgent threat because these regimes could use CRBNs for 'blackmail, terror and mass murder',²⁸ sell or supply them to terrorist allies, or lose control of such 'catastrophic technologies.'²⁹ This would essentially increase the risk of a WMD attack against the homeland. US progress in the GWoT was thus measured against its ability to successfully neutralize the threat posed by the countries it identified as outlaw regimes and/or weak/failing states.

(f) Safeguarding the American homeland

A crucial parameter of success in the GWoT was the United States' ability to keep the homeland safe and free from terrorist attacks. United States' ability to safeguard the homeland was judged on the basis of three elements: (i) successful deterrence; (ii) successful critical infrastructure protection and resilience building; and, (iii) successful pre-emption. The US deterrence strategy emphasized 'denying enemy objectives by both preventing attacks and protecting against attacks.'³⁰ A key component of preventing attacks involved, as discussed previously, neutralizing outlaw regimes and denying terrorists physical, financial, legal and cyber safe-havens that would enable them to plan and execute attacks against the United States and its interests. Another key element in preventing external attacks on the United States, its populations and its critical infrastructure involved dissuading adversaries by using the missile defense program to impose 'operational and economic costs on those who would employ missiles to threaten ... [America], its forces, its interests, or its partners.'³¹

In terms of critical infrastructure protection and resilience building, success was gauged on the basis of the active and multi-layered measures taken to secure

borders and transportation against external threats as well as, developing and implementing actionable plans outlining critical infrastructure protection roles and responsibilities for ‘all levels of government, private industry, nongovernmental agencies and tribal partners.’³² Finally, successful pre-emptive action sought to keep the war and transnational terrorist threat away from American shores and involved actively confronting – ‘when possible, early and at a safe distance – those who directly threaten’³³ the US, its population and its critical infrastructure. It is worth noting that pre-emptive action encompassed a strongly unilateralist tendency. Thus, while the United States may have sought ‘to enlist the support of the international community’ in the fight against terrorism, if necessary, it was ready to exercise ‘its right to self-defense’³⁴ and act alone. The absence/failure of attempted terrorist attacks on the homeland post-9/11 is seen to indicate that United States’ strategy of safeguarding the homeland was a success.³⁵

(g) Democratization

The Bush administration tended to view the advancement of effective democracy as the only long-term solution to the threat posed by AQ and its radical ideology. Why? For one, democracies are seen to uphold the basic liberal values of dignity, human rights and ‘freedom of religion, speech, conscience, assembly, association and press.’³⁶ Effective democracies hold free and fair elections and allow their citizens to elect representative governments. They also exercise effective sovereignty, maintain control over their territory and order within their borders. Democracies ‘address causes of conflict peacefully, protect independent and impartial systems of justice, punish crime, embrace the rule of law, resist corruption ... [and protect] the institutions of civil society.’³⁷ In short, by preventing political alienation and promoting the values of freedom and dignity, democracies ensure that their citizens do not become disaffected and, as such, susceptible to recruitment by transnational terrorists. Representative governments also enable citizens to effect peaceful transformations, thus leach popular support and sympathy away from terrorist groups that espouse engendering change through violence. Effective democracies also efficiently govern their territories making it harder for transnational terrorists to penetrate their borders and use them as physical safe-havens. In short, democracy promotion was the backbone of the United States’ ‘battle of ideas’ and a key hallmark of its success in the GWoT. Democracy promotion was seen as crucial for making ‘America safer for generations to come.’³⁸ For instance:

- *Before 9/11*, the United States, did not openly challenge repression and restricted liberties in the Arab world, prioritizing stability, yet stability was not the outcome—the lack of freedom in the region meant anger and resentment grew, radicalism thrived, and terrorists found willing recruits. *Today*, democracy and freedom are an integral part of the US agenda globally.

- *Before 9/11*, throughout most of the broader Middle East and North Africa, democratic institutions and processes were, with the exception of Israel, largely weak or even nonexistent. *Today*, freely contested multiparty elections are more common and are increasingly accepted as the basis for legitimate government.³⁹

Closely linked to the idea of democracy promotion as a mechanism to undermine the threat of terrorism was enabling allies and partners to counter terrorism. While a number of nations needed to fight extremism within their own borders, many lacked the capacity to do so. Thus, a key marker of US success involved promoting conditions conducive to democracy, including assisting international partners to bolster their capacity to 'fight terrorism, defend themselves and collectively meet challenges to common interests.'⁴⁰ The US believed that such assistance was vital for creating a global environment that would be inhospitable to terrorists and terrorist ideologies. A critical element of such capacity building involved working with coalition partners to train indigenous forces, giving them the necessary skills to combat terrorism and violence, e.g. the Afghan National Army, the Iraqi army and police force. Such capacity building was predicated on the logic that security was a necessary precondition for countering terrorist ideologies and propaganda operations as secure environments enabled moderates to express themselves without fear of intimidation or reprisal. Security was also essential for the 'success of many of the counter ideology efforts of other government agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organization, and the private sector'⁴¹ and thus crucial to democracy promotion. Moreover, such capacity building was also a necessary condition for initiating and facilitating US troop reduction and eventual withdrawal from areas of active military campaigns such as Iraq. Thus, successful capacity building and troop withdrawal were important subsets of democratization and, as such, also delineated how US success was assessed in the GWOt.

(h) Building, strengthening and sustaining the international effort to fight terrorism

A final indicator used to gauge US progress was its ability to build a global coalition to address the threat of AQ.⁴² The US believed that long-term success in the GWOt could only be guaranteed through 'a powerful coalition of nations maintaining a strong, united front against terrorism'⁴³ that would essentially deny terrorist groups access to physical, financial, legal and cyber safe-havens. Predicated on this logic, it boasted how 'more than 170 countries [were] engaged in activities ranging from freezing terrorist assets to sharing intelligence to providing combat forces for coalition operations'⁴⁴ in the GWOt. The US thus, adopted a multi-faceted strategy for building, strengthening and sustaining the international effort required to fight terrorism and this strategy formed the basis on which its performance was judged. First, success was determined on the basis of how efficiently the US worked with partners who were willing and able to counter the challenge of terrorism. This essentially involved the effective reorientation of its existing partnerships

and the creation of new mechanisms to facilitate cooperation between partners.⁴⁵ Second, as discussed previously, US progress was determined on the basis of how successfully it developed the indigenous capabilities of countries that were willing, but unable, to address the threat of terrorism. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of coalition building was the presence of so-called 'reluctant states.' These were states that may have had the capability to fight terrorism but were unwilling, for a whole gamut of reasons, to do so. These reasons ranged from the presence of 'external threats, internal schisms that enable[d] one faction to use the state to extend tacit or active support to terrorists, or cultural or political differences that lead to disagreements over what constitute[d] 'terrorist' ... activity.'⁴⁶ US progress here was assessed on the basis of how successfully it persuaded such reluctant regimes to meet their international obligations to fight terrorism by participating in the GWoT. Both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are key examples of this particular metric. Finally, US progress was also measured on the basis of how effectively it could compel unwilling states, i.e. states that were active sponsors of terrorism, to desist from providing such support (e.g. through regime change as seen in Iraq).

The US and al-Qaeda as Constructed in America's metrics of the GWoT

As seen above, all metrics are imperfect and dependent upon the variables chosen. Yet regardless of the gamut of methodological problems inherent in defining and generating any set of metrics, the metrics that are produced tend to reveal much more than just details of the specific phenomenon they purport to measure. In our case, it is often overlooked how the arbitrary, and often problematic, measures of success developed by the Bush administration, consciously or inadvertently, produced and reproduced very particular notions of AQ and the US within themselves. Thus, while there has been considerable discussion about the legitimacy of the GWoT and the behavior and construction of the world's sole superpower in the discourse of the war, relatively little space has been assigned to how AQ has been constructed within the metrics used to assess America's performance in its confrontation with transnational terrorism. Similarly, little thought has been given to how these metrics reveal a very particular kind of power projection in the international system on part of the United States. These metrics construct an unchallenged view of the 'enemy,' which unproblematically frames and accepts AQ as an exogenous 'other.' AQ thus becomes the anomaly threatening modern, tolerant, civilized societies and the world, as we know it. At the same time, these metrics clearly delineate what the United States is, what it stands for and what its rights and responsibilities are in the post-Cold War international system. Thus, methodologically flawed, bare-boned and a hindrance to any objective assessment of America's performance in the GWoT though they may be, the metrics generated by the US government nonetheless also provide critical epistemological insights into the Bush administration's particular construction of AQ, the world and America's role and position within it.

Any attempt to understand how the US and AQ is framed in these metrics must first contextualize the GWoT in an understanding of the United States' position within the international system at a given moment in history. This is because understanding and acknowledging America's system-level hegemonic ambitions in the post-Cold War international environment explains US foreign policy under the GWoT. These ambitions also actively influence the construction of its self-identity which, in turn, shapes how the United States' views and assesses its own performance in the fight against AQ. Strategically, the GWoT reflects America's attempt to use its position as the world's sole superpower to secure an unmatched position of advantage in the international system. It also represents the culmination of the neoconservative call for using force to check the emergence of potential challengers to US predominance that emerged in the period immediately after the Cold War ended. The neoconservatives argued that the new post-Cold War world order meant that traditional balance of power strategies were now not only unnecessary but also imminently unsuitable. Moreover, various observers also emphasized that ongoing system-level changes meant that the US could not remain the sole superpower in the world forever. This was America's 'unipolar moment' rather than a 'fixed power structure replacing the Cold War balance of power system'⁴⁷ and as such, not only the neoconservatives but also successive administrations argued, that it was imperative that the US take advantage of its position to both preserve and extend its hegemony in the international system. Therefore, it was unipolarity that exerted the structural pressures on the US that affected its behavior in the international system. The result was a realignment in US foreign policy, most ostensibly reflected in the shift from multilateralism to unilateralism as seen in America's gradual abandonment of institutional cooperation and established multilateral strategies, such as alliance-building and the tactical use of sanctions. While this understanding of the international system along with the possibilities it presented for US action developed over successive administrations, it was wholeheartedly embraced by George W. Bush's administration. Washington's growing unilateralism was first demonstrated by the administration's refusal to allow a NATO-led response in Afghanistan following September 11 and then again in its illegal attacks on Iraq in 2003.⁴⁸ Therefore, while post-Cold War global supremacy may have provided the United States with the conditions, logic and unprecedented material and ideational tools to project its values far beyond its territorial boundaries, it was the Bush administration and the 9/11 attacks that, in essence, facilitated the active assertion of the coercive, unilateralist and militaristic tendencies latent within US policy and discourse. As such, the shift from multilateralism to unilateralism provides important insights into how the United States legitimized and projected its power in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 world and ideationally produced and reproduced its particular notion of hegemony in the international system.

But apart from reflecting system-level strategic ambitions, the United State's gradual shift from benign hegemon to what is now essentially a neo-imperialist power⁴⁹ must also be seen as an exercise in active identity construction in the post-

Cold War world. In many ways this neo-imperialist 'turn' may be best understood by viewing the post-Cold War evolution of American self-identity through the lens of American exceptionalism, i.e. an assertion of both its own uniqueness as well as its right to be different. The exceptionalism view of American foreign policy believes that 'liberal values transfer readily to foreign affairs', and pushes the US toward both 'remaking' international society and asserting its right to be different by taking 'individual action against threats'.⁵⁰ Hassner rather harshly states that, 'exceptionalism carries with it a tendency to consider that the United States is empowered, because of the purity of its intentions and the excellence of its regime, to judge between good and evil, to award others good or bad points, to punish the wicked and troublemakers, not to recognize any superior legal authority above that which comes from the American people themselves, and to consider any external inclination to cast doubt on American intentions or to apply to it the criteria that it applies to others as an insult'.⁵¹ Of course, the 'belief in the essential rightness of American values'⁵² and concomitantly a self-identity based on such a belief has been reinforced by United States' victory in the 'three ideological wars of the twentieth century'.⁵³ Inherent in this exceptionalism is a clear notion of what it means to be American and concomitantly the rights and responsibilities that come with being the United States. The metrics of the GWOt clearly reveal the United States' construction of itself as the Bush administration repeatedly measures its performance against the standard of the post-Cold War identity that America created for itself.

Of course, identities are not pre-given or fixed but performatively constructed, sustained and/or transformed through processes of interaction. More significantly, identity is 'constituted in relation to difference' and vice versa.⁵⁴ In other words, identity and difference are intimately related as constructions of identity implicitly involve the 'inscription of boundaries that serves to demarcate' how the 'self' is constituted differently from the 'other'. Hence, the 'self'/the 'domestic'/the 'inside' often tends to be defined, at least partially, on the basis of what it is not; just as the 'other'/'the foreign'/'the 'outside' tends to be represented by external antagonists and/or 'internal others'. These borders of 'difference' between the self and other are usually maintained by assigning a series of 'identity markers',⁵⁵ which distinguish those that belong to the inside from those who come from the outside. Hence, constructions of otherness essentially imply constructions of self and vice versa. Within the context of the GWOt, the deliberate, discursive creation of the 'external other' (i.e. the terrorists) effectively reinforced the identity of the 'internal self' (i.e. the US/the 'West');⁵⁶ as US self-identity was reinforced it simultaneously served to cement the identity of the AQ-other. Both identities were, at least partially, defined by their inherent differences – each was what the other was not. Metrics of success in the GWOt are thus a discursive enterprise central to the constitution, production and maintenance of not only the identity of the United States but also its adversary, al-Qaeda.

(a) Constructions of the American Self

Given this background, what are some constructions of the US-self evident in the metrics produced during the GWOt? To begin with, the metrics outlined in the previous section created a truly exceptional USA and, in doing so, provided us with critical insights into the United States' particular understanding of its role, position and privileges in the post-9/11, unipolar world. The discourse of the GWOt framed 9/11 as an exceptional act and a national tragedy. America was attacked because it was America, because it was 'the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world.'⁵⁷ In constructing 9/11 as an exceptional act of violence this discourse (re)established and underscored the intrinsically exceptional nature of the United States. Thus, 9/11 demonstrated that, as the sole superpower, the US not only enjoyed the advantage of exceptional powers and privileges in the international system but also that it attracted exceptional threats. As the focus of both 'myriad resentments and the bearer of great responsibilities,'⁵⁸ it was obliged to secure itself, not only because it had to but also because it could.⁵⁹ Of course, as stated previously, the United States' heightened perceptions of threat and insecurity were essentially rooted in the structural pressures generated by the post-Cold War unipolar system.⁶⁰ These pressures not only elevated America's perceptions of the threats it was exposed to but also complemented elements of its exceptionalism. Thus, America's propensity toward hypersecuritization i.e., its 'tendency to both exaggerate threats and resort to excessive countermeasures,'⁶¹ already underway due to conditions of unipolarity, was further intensified by the attacks of 9/11. Now not only did this hypersecuritization predispose it toward adopting an aggressive, unilateralist response to 9/11, but the universalist element of American exceptionalism also meant that it 'could justify the pursuit of its own national security not just on the basis of preserving a distinctive nation ... but also on the basis of protecting the future wellbeing and rights of all of humankind.'⁶² In short, the interplay between unipolarity and universalist aspects of American exceptionalism enabled the US to claim special rights and privileges in pursuit of its national security.⁶³ Thus, in constructing 9/11 as exceptional the Bush administration not only underscored the unique and privileged status of the US but also justified the GWOt as the legitimate and necessary response of an exceptional nation-state.

The metrics of the GWOt also framed 9/11 as an attack upon the principles of democracy and liberal values. The Bush administration responded by attempting to macrosecuritize the terrorist threat as a vital challenge to both 'civilization as we know it' and the Western way of life as exemplified by the liberal values of democracy, freedom, civil liberties and human rights. Implicit in the macrosecuritization discourse of the metrics was the Bush administration's temporal and spatial location in a post-Cold War reality, which came with the firm belief that the collapse of the Soviet Union had effectively demonstrated that the liberal state and democracy were the only viable option for post-Cold War order. The logic of the GWOt was thus predicated on the absolute belief that 'liberal

values are universal, and that ... [their] intrinsic moral and practical superiority ... gives them the right to claim the future of humankind.⁶⁴

An intrinsic component of this belief, evident in the metrics, was the United States' own self-image as the carrier of acceptable shared values. The metrics thus strongly illustrate the US belief that its promotion of liberal values, through both persuasion and the use of force, would not only (re)ensure its own national security but also simultaneously protect the wellbeing of all 'civilization.' This conviction underpinned both its battle of ideas as well as its project of aggressive democracy promotion through regime-change. Thus, the US argued that it must 'extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent ... [and] defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere.'⁶⁵ At the same time, the fact that the US chose to defend shared values in a coercive, unilateralist and militaristic manner confirmed its exceptional status in the post-9/11 world.

This status was further underscored by these metrics defining the 'entire world' as the geopolitical space for America's military campaign against AQ and transnational terrorism. As the Bush administration asserted, Afghanistan was not the 'only battlefield' on which the US would engage the terrorists. Instead, it would destroy the '[t]housands of trained terrorists [who] remain[ed] at large with cells in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and across Asia'⁶⁶ so as to create a 'a global environment inhospitable to violent extremists and all who support them.'⁶⁷ US military action under the GWoT was directed not only at its 'primary terrorist enemies' but at all 'violent extremist groups' of global reach that posed 'a serious and continuing threat' to its security.⁶⁸ The United States' national security strategy thus encompassed the entire international system and, in doing so, marked it out as a hyper-power with global agency.

The United States' exceptional reach and ability was also amply demonstrated through its body-count indicator. The use of statistical figures as markers of success underscored America's self-image as a hegemon with 'unprecedented - and unequalled - strength and influence in the world,'⁶⁹ a position that brought with it 'unparalleled responsibilities, obligations and opportunity.'⁷⁰ Thus, America not only had the exceptional ability to exterminate and incapacitate thousands of terrorists and identify and dismantle hundreds of terrorist threats, cells and networks,⁷¹ but also liberate 'more than 50 million Afghans and Iraqis from despotism, terrorism and dictatorship.'⁷² This metric thus effectively framed the US as a beacon of hope, liberty and freedom, as the leader of 'the armies of liberation,'⁷³ and as the only nation powerful enough to reshape the international system as it saw fit to keep both itself and the world secure.

US efforts to build an international coalition to fight terrorism and engender regime-change also reinforced its exceptional status by underscoring how its unique position accorded it the special privilege of operating according to starkly different standards than those applied to the rest of international society. Thus, on the one hand, the US voiced a strong commitment to liberty and made exaggerated claims regarding the significance and centrality of its own sovereignty. On the

other hand, it used its unique position and role in international society to transgress against the sovereignty of other states. It emphasized that: 'it is unacceptable for regimes to use the principle of sovereignty as a shield behind which they claim to be free to engage in activities that pose enormous threats to their citizens, neighbors or the rest of the international community.'⁷⁴ Predicated on this logic, the US wrought regime change in both Afghanistan and Iraq and, in doing so, effected substantial changes in the international system through a direct breach of sovereignty. The message was clear: the sovereignty of other states was secondary to, and subsumed by, the sovereignty of the sole superpower.

The United States' self-image as benign hegemon was also more than evident in its claim that it had engendered an 'unprecedented level of international cooperation'⁷⁵ in the GWoT by bringing more than 170 countries together to fight a common enemy. However, as seen previously, this coalition not only included willing partners but also a number of so-called reluctant states, such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which were compelled to participate in the GWoT. In coercing these reluctant regimes into participating the US successfully imposed its own agenda on these countries and verified its exceptional status in international society. Hence, the metrics of regime-change and coalition-building effectively constructed the United States as a meta-sovereign that could determine or, at the very least, influence the foreign and security policies of other states in the international system and thus set the global agenda to guarantee its own strategic interests.

The United States' status was further confirmed by its ability to set a complex international agenda through the discourse of the GWoT. This is most clearly evident in the deliberate and successful coupling of what were previously two separate issues, i.e., terrorism and WMD proliferation. It is worth noting that America's efforts to argue for a similar nexus between transnational terrorists, WMD proliferation and rogue regimes was somewhat less successful, primarily due to the fact that no WMDs were ever found in Iraq, even though their existence had provided the key rationale for the 2003 invasion. However, at the same time, it is worth stressing that this argument did serve its purpose by facilitating the United States' pre-emptive strike on Iraq, which enabled it to take advantage of its unique position to both preserve and extend its hegemony and exceptional status in the post-9/11 unipolar world.

Pre-emption and active deterrence were also core components of the United States' homeland defense strategy. Both were symbolic of its exceptional nature and exemplified that it played by a different set of rules in the international system. First, America's tremendous military and economic capabilities in combination with its unique position in the international system enabled it to unilaterally and pre-emptively respond to perceived threats. Second, its capabilities and position also allowed it to neutralise threats at a safe distance. This effectively insulated the homeland from potential attacks and (once again) guaranteed that 'perfect' security that the United States had come to expect as a 'result of living for centuries shielded behind two oceans'⁷⁶ and which it sees as its natural right. Third, these tremendous material resources also gave the United States' the means to develop

the capabilities of partner nations that were willing, but unable, to fight terrorism. This was part of a longer-term strategy that sought to promote security, democracy and create a global environment that was inhospitable to violent extremism. Thus, the United States' material preponderance not only allowed it to act alone to preserve its national interests but also enabled it to train and equip other countries to fight for its strategic interests and support its international agenda.

In short, in terms of agency, scope, geopolitical space, international agendas, the security policies of other states and the manner in which all regions and countries were subsumed to its gaze, the metrics of success in the GWoT constructed and demanded a truly exceptional USA. In revealing this particular construction of the United States, these metrics divulged much more than what they purported to measure. More importantly, they measured what they constructed. Hence, the metrics did not just measure US success in the GWoT they measured the exceptional status of the USA.

(b) Constructions of the Other

Having elucidated how the metrics of the GWoT construct an exceptional USA I now turn toward locating how the AQ-other is constituted within them. First and foremost, I must underscore that the metrics constructed AQ as a counterpoint to and mirror image of the United States. As such, AQ was the embodiment of everything that the US was not. It was 'evil,' 'inhuman,' 'murderous' and 'barbaric' – the very antithesis of 'progress, pluralism, tolerance and freedom.'⁷⁷ The deeply neo-Orientalist discourse of the metrics, thus (re)produced rather familiar (mis)representations of the 'non-Western' world. However, even more crucially, as these metrics constructed a US-self that was exceptional in its systemic omnipotence AQ, as its 'other,' emerged as a truly formidable enemy in terms of its reach and capabilities. AQ's ominous nature therefore functioned as the counterpoint to America's exceptional status in the international system and became the core construction of the enemy within the metrics of the GWoT.

The metrics first constructed AQ as the key threat to the liberal values of democracy, freedom, civil liberties and human rights, i.e. to the very foundations of the post-Cold War world. Hence, AQ was framed as a vital challenge to 'civilization' as a whole. Of course as mentioned earlier, the US, as world hegemon and self-declared carrier of universal values, had very clear notions of its own rights and responsibilities in the international system. As such, it was unsurprising that it took the lead in the ideological and military campaign that was waged to defend these shared values, thus not only ensuring its own national security but ostensibly also protecting the future wellbeing of the 'civilised world.' US success in this campaign was measured on the basis of how effectively it could safeguard these shared values of democracy and liberalism against the threat posed by AQ. In other words, the metrics implicitly constructed AQ as posing a direct challenge to both United States' capabilities as well as its values. But in exaggerating the threat posed by AQ to the security and status of the United States, the metrics

constructed AQ as a much more formidable entity than it may have been in reality. This was truly astonishing given that AQ was a non-state organization with a fraction of the United States' material and ideological resources at its disposal.

In constructing AQ's attack on the liberal values of democracy and human rights as a civilizational threat the Bush administration also generated an image of an organization that was uncontrollably violent and irrational. This was not the rational, systematic, leashed violence of the nation state, instead AQ's violence was framed as the uncontrolled violence of the 'barbarian other' that was directed, without restraint, at combatants and civilians alike. The very 'savagery' of this violence revealed the 'nature of the enemy.'⁷⁸ In direct contrast to the modern, progressive, liberal self, the metrics thus depicted AQ as the very anti-thesis of civilization; as anachronistic, primeval and pre-modern, and a direct challenge to universally accepted norms of the modern, liberal, Westphalian state system. AQ was constituted as 'an inherent agitator' that needed to 'be transformed or eliminated'⁷⁹ to prevent it from harming shared values. The metrics therefore constructed an enemy that not only had the capacity to directly challenge the sole superpower but which was all the more fearsome for its tendency toward unrestrained violence.

AQ's formidable nature was also clearly seen in the way the metrics defined the 'entire world' as the geopolitical space for the America's military campaign. Inherent in the United States' expansive geopolitical scope was the understanding that AQ also exercised similar influence and agency over the entire globe. These were something more than just 'normal' terrorists; they were opponents formidable enough to force the hegemon to alter its national security strategy and shift the international agenda. In justifying the GWoT as a logical US response to 'transnational terrorism' the metrics effectively granted 9/11 an 'exceptional ahistoricity.'⁸⁰ This removed 9/11 from its specific historical context and enabled the metrics to frame AQ's attacks as a rejection of American values rather than a response to over a century of its interventionist foreign policy in the Middle East and elsewhere. This construction further bolstered both the United States' 'self-image as the carrier of universal values'⁸¹ as well as its projection of AQ as 'an inherent agitator' and unparalleled threat to shared values.

AQ's formidable reach and ability was also patently evident in the United States' body-count approach. Thus, on the one hand, the figures used as markers of success underscored that the US was a hegemon of exceptional and unprecedented strength, reach and ability. On the other hand, these figures suggested that AQ was a non-state actor like no other: its power to leverage support and recruit members across the world was unprecedented and unusual. Its financial assets and fundraising activities were large enough to warrant the implementation of new legal tools to prosecute its members, and detect and disrupt its activities. Its attack capabilities were powerful enough to warrant a military response and to force the US government to not only strengthen its air, land, sea and border security but also to establish entire departments and sections in order to effectively deal with the threat it posed. Thus, statistical figures may have constructed a US-self that was

powerful enough to reshape the international system as it saw fit, but these figures also bolstered the image of an AQ-other that was potent enough to engender such a response from the hegemon.

US efforts to build an international coalition to fight terrorism and engender regime-change also attested to the formidable nature of AQ by highlighting how the US, despite its exceptional status in world politics, remained reliant on a coalition of international partners to create a global environment that was 'inhospitable' to AQ's particular brand of terrorism. This international coalition thus not only supplied troops and resources for the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also contributed toward its efforts to eliminate AQ's physical, financial, legal and cyber safe-havens.⁸² The fact that AQ had such wide-ranging sanctuaries from which to plan, organize, train and execute operations was, once again, a testimony to its 'exceptional' nature. Moreover, as outlined previously, United States' international coalition against AQ not only included willing partners but also a number of reluctant states, e.g. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which had to be coerced into fighting terrorism. The presence of such reluctant regimes was an indication of the powerful influence exerted by AQ and its ideology upon the leaders and/or citizens of these nations. This influence not only marked AQ as patently different from any other terrorist organization but also underscored how it could directly challenge the United States' status as a meta-sovereign in the international system.

The United States' ability to successfully link the issues of terrorism and WMD proliferation also constructed a very particular understanding of AQ in its metrics. First, this link emphasized AQ's desire to access and use 'catastrophic technologies' against the US and its allies. Second, in underscoring potential partnerships between AQ and 'outlaw regimes' that could supply or sell it the technology, material and expertise necessary to develop WMDs, the metrics also framed AQ as an ever-expanding threat. The rationale behind the invasion of Iraq was thus based upon destroying this supposed nexus between AQ, Saddam Hussein, and what the US claimed was his cache of WMDs. It is worth noting that rogue regimes that either desired or possessed the technology to develop WMDs had existed prior to the GWOt. Yet they were never constructed as the urgent and critical threats to international peace and security as they were post-9/11. Similarly, never before had a terrorist group's desire to access WMDs been countered as it was under the GWOt. This suggests that it was AQ that wrought a qualitative change in the United States' perception of what had been long-standing threats in the international system. Thus, in prioritizing the WMD-terrorism-rouge state nexus post-9/11, the metrics once again underscored the formidable nature and deep-seated impact of AQ.

AQ was rendered even more dangerous in the metrics by the implicit recognition that it had evolved since the GWOt was first declared. Hence, in 2006, the US asserted that the 'enemy we face today...is not the same enemy we faced on September 11'⁸³ and evidence suggested this was indeed true. Thus, the metrics also framed AQ as an adaptable, cunning and flexible foe, whose ideology of

global jihad directly challenged the principles of democracy and universal liberal values and, in doing so, forced the US to engage in the first ideological battle of the post-Cold War era. That AQ's radical vision of world order compelled the US to respond with its own 'battle of ideas' is perhaps the most powerful testimony of the staggering influence exerted by the fundamentalist ideology of the AQ-other. Of course, the fact that AQ could pressure the United States into adopting a policy of pre-emptive action and active deterrence also confirmed the organization's unprecedented reach and formidable status.

Thus the US, in constructing AQ as its enemy/the other, generated a very specific image of the group within its metrics. To some degree these constructions were founded upon assumptions rooted in the United States' neo-Orientalist conceptions of the 'non-Western' world. However, in constructing AQ as its own mirror image, the US also implicitly constructed it as an enemy worthy of the world's sole superpower; and, in doing so, unconsciously imbued it with characteristics similar to its own. Thus, AQ became more than just anachronistic, primeval and pre-modern, more than just a barbaric antithesis of civilization. Instead, it emerged as 'an exceptional' terrorist movement, one that was both unprecedented and formidable in its material and ideological strength, its reach and ability. AQ was constituted as powerful enough to exert an influence upon other transnational terrorist movements and impact the political and security policies of state actors in the international system. The ever-expanding nature of the threat it posed was constructed as formidable enough to engender changes in the international agenda. Like the US, AQ operated according to its own set of rules. It possessed its own ideology, values and vision of the world, all of which were potent enough to challenge universal values and the dominant meta-narrative constructed by the hegemon. Like the US, it sought to 'remake' the world in its own image. In short, in terms of agency, scope, geopolitical space, international agendas and the political and security policies of other states, the US metrics of the GWOt constructed a truly formidable AQ, one that was the equal and opposite of the US-self.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that producing metrics to assess the success or failure of a counter-terrorism campaign like the GWOt was a difficult task for a variety of reasons. The key limitation is rooted in the fact that the very concepts of victory/success and defeat/failure are incredibly problematic to define and delineate in the context of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Thus, indicators that have been used to establish victory or defeat in traditional confrontations fall dismally short when applied to counter-terrorism campaigns. In the case of the GWOt in particular, assessments of US success and failure have also been hampered by ill-defined timeframes and constantly shifting goalposts.

It is, at least partially, because of these reasons that there are really no standardized, consistent metrics that measure US performance in the GWOt. Assessments of US success in the GWOt tend to be derived from the political statements made by President Bush and other high-level government officials. These statements, in turn, are enshrined as national strategy documents which also serve to establish some parameters of US success. Yet other metrics are revealed by the few deliberately formulated scorecards produced by various departments of the US government. However, as demonstrated, none of these are really comprehensive, systematic or consistent assessments of US performance in the GWOt. Yet despite these handicaps, these political statements, national strategy documents and scorecards still divulge what can be best described as a set of bare-boned, nascent metrics. Moreover, broad themes can be also identified in these inconsistent and nascent metrics, which essentially operate as the defining criteria for assessing US success against AQ in the GWOt.

Even more crucially, these metrics provide critical epistemological insights into the Bush administration's particular constructions of the US and AQ. These constructions need to be historically contextualized within the United States' unipolar moment and thus, the GWOt must be understood as being geared toward maintaining America's position of power and hegemony in the international system. Therefore, in terms of agency, scope, geopolitical space, international agendas and so on, the metrics construct a truly exceptional post-Cold War USA. However, while ostensibly these metrics may claim to measure US performance they did not measure its success in the GWOt alone; instead, and above all else, they measured and re-affirmed the exceptional status of the US in the post-9/11 international system.

Similarly these metrics constructed AQ as a direct counter-point to the United States' own self-identity and shed light on what the US thought it 'knew about AQ'. To some degree, these constructions were founded upon assumptions rooted in the United States' neo-Orientalist conceptions of the 'non-Western' world. Thus, the AQ enemy-other was constituted as anachronistic, pre-modern, irrational and violent. At the same time in constructing AQ as its own mirror image, the United States also imbued it with many characteristics that were similar to its own and in doing so, transformed it into a terrorist movement that was both unprecedented and formidable in its material and ideological strength, reach and ability. Thus, once again the metrics not only measured US success against the AQ-other, but also revealed how its perceptions of itself, its role and position in the post-Cold War world determined how it viewed and constructed its enemy. AQ is therefore more a product of employed metrics, rather than their pre-given object. The politically charged categories and measurements used in the US metrics thus create a 'measurable' entity that complies with US self-understanding in the GWOt.

Hence, it is amply clear from this discussion that that all metrics are imperfect and heavily dependent upon the variables that one chooses. Far from being objective, metrics tend to be no more than problematic measurements of the actions of given actors. As I have demonstrated, metrics also encompass a host

of assumptions and social constructions about the actors they seek to assess. In other words, metrics tend to construct actors before they assess their actions. It is therefore imperative to analyze and deconstruct the assumptions implicit in all metrics in order to reveal how actors are epistemologically constructed *a priori* to study. First, this would serve to reveal what these actors are constructed as within the metrics in question. Second, this would enable us to recognize that metrics are never really objective, and they tend to assess an actor's performance on the basis of how they construct that actor in the first place. Performance and success is thus measured against an abstract, subjective standard that is both preconceived and idealized. Of course, this is a key limitation when using metrics to assess social phenomenon and difficult, if not impossible, to circumvent.

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⁵⁸ Der Derian, J. 2002. In *Terrorism: Before and After 9/11*, in *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order*, edited by K. Booth and T. Dunne. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 103.

⁵⁹ Kagan, R. 2002. Power and Weakness, *Policy Review* 113, 1–29; Kagan, R. 2003, *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*. London: Atlantic Books.

⁶⁰ Buzan. *The United States*.

⁶¹ Ibid., 18.

⁶² Ibid., 18.

⁶³ Ibid., 18–20.

⁶⁴ Buzan. *American Exceptionalism*, 156.

⁶⁵ Bush, *Radio Address*.

⁶⁶ *National Security Strategy 2002*, 5.

⁶⁷ *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism 2006*, 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁹ *National Security Strategy 2002*, 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷¹ Department of Justice, *Patriot Act: Myth vs. Reality*, 1–3.

⁷² US DoD 2006, *Quadrennial Review 2006*, vii.

⁷³ Bush, G.W. 2004. Defending the War in Iraq. *Presidential Rhetoric* [Online] Available at: http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/bush_firstterm.html [accessed: 20 November 2010].

⁷⁴ *National Defense Strategy 2005*, 1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

⁷⁶ Buzan. *The United States*, 18.

⁷⁷ Jackson. *Writing the War*.

⁷⁸ Bush, G.W. 2005. War Update at Fort Bragg, N.C., *Presidential Rhetoric* [Online] Available at: <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/06.28.05.html> [accessed: 05 February 2011].

⁷⁹ Mullin, C. 2010. 'Islamist Challenges to the 'Liberal Peace' Discourse: the Case of Hamas and the Israel-Palestine Peace Process'. *Millennium. Journal of International Studies* 39(2), 529.

⁸⁰ Der Derian, *In Terrorem*, 102.

⁸¹ Buzan, *The United States*, 11.

⁸² *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism 2006*, 16–7.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5.

Chapter 6

Fear as Sovereign Strategy and the Popular Tactics of Laughter

Andreas Behnke

The starting point for this chapter is provided by the former head of the CIA's bin Laden Issue Station, Michael Scheuer's, argument that Osama bin Laden should be understood as an 'inciter-in-chief' of violence, rather than its actual perpetrator.¹ This argument is usually understood as an explanation of the particular nature of the operations of contemporary decentralized and networked terrorist organizations, in which no single cell or agent exercises command and control over these operations.² Within the context of this chapter, however, it is interpreted as the starting point for an investigation into particular state practices through which the 'reality' of the terror attributed to al-Qaeda's actions is made real as a matter of sense-experiences in everyday life. In other words, in this interpretation, the incitement is directed towards states to rouse fear, not towards other local terrorist organizations to take action.

This chapter argues that the ephemeral sensation of fear in response to a terrorist 'event' has to be rendered as a constant experience of everyday life in order for exceptional counter-terrorism measures to be considered legitimate, and that consequently the fear that terrorism is alleged to induce itself is instead produced through the very practices of states that are presented as necessary responses to this threat. There is, I shall argue contra Derrida, nothing inherent or essential in terrorism that guarantees its continued effectiveness in terms of installing fear in a population. In other words, the actual experience of this terror does not refer to an encounter with terrorist practices as such, but rather to practices of 'counter-terrorism' that produce the simulacrum of terror as a quotidian experience. The experience of 'terror' is therefore tied to the emulation of fear-inducing strategies by the state that wrests the governmentality of fear from the terrorists and re-instates it under the auspices of the extant sovereign.

The chapter will focus on one such 'simulating' strategies: the US administration's Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS), i.e., the colour-coded terrorism warning system deployed by the US government in response to the attacks of 9/11.³ Drawing on Michel de Certeau's discussion of 'strategy' and 'tactics' in everyday life, the Advisory System is framed here as a 'sovereign strategy', that is to say, as a practice in which sovereign power defines 'relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats ... [so] they can be managed'.⁴ It reflects the sovereign's 'Cartesian attitude' to delimit its place and define its power

‘in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other’.⁵ As this chapter will demonstrate, this sovereign strategy relies heavily on the political management of fear and knowledge. The investigated state practices related to the HSAS aim at maintaining a general anxiety of a potential terrorist threat. As part of this strategy, in a Janus-faced fashion, the state actually *withholds* information and knowledge about the material and actual reality of such threats, whilst at the same time claiming relevant knowledge and authority to raise or lower the threat level on the HSAS.

At the same time, this chapter investigates what de Certeau call the ‘popular tactics’ that emerged within the American public; tactics that defied and denied the authority of the sovereign to define and manage the threat (levels) of terrorism through this strategy. The chapter focusses on how the Advisory System was ‘tricked by an art’, ridiculed and mocked, subjected to an ‘aesthetics of “tricks” (artists operations)’ and an ‘ethics of tenacity’⁶ with its countless ways to undermine and reject the authority of the sovereign to structure the space of terror/fear through the colour code of the Advisory System.

The guiding question for this investigation then is: What everyday life reality of terror is produced through this state strategy? How does the sovereign assert his monopoly on the use of fear and what experience of terror does this produce for the public? Secondly, in what way do these sovereign strategies allow for, or even induce, counter-practices and resistance to the production of fear and the in-stated terrorization of society? What tactics emerge as forms of resistance that ‘vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open’⁷ in the sovereign’s strategies? As we shall see, although de Certeau himself emphasizes that ‘a tactic is an art of the weak’, in this case it actually contributed to the demise of the strategy it so creatively and wittily attacked. In a rare case of contrition, after numerous humorous tactical interventions, the sovereign conceded the ridiculous nature of his strategy and, whilst not abolished it completely, nonetheless modified it significantly with the introduction in April 2011 of the Homeland Terrorism Advisory System.

From Essence to Sense

For all the variety within them, most definitions of terrorism include a reference to the fear that terrorist violence is supposed to create amongst a public audience in order to influence political decisions and actions.⁸ Arguably, however, this crucial aspect is never fully explored in mainstream terrorism studies. Usually, empirical investigations of terrorism and terrorist campaigns focus instead on underlying ideological or religious motivations of terrorist organizations, as well as on the strategies and tactics employed in pursuit of their goals. The fear that terrorist actions are supposed to incite is therefore assumed to be the necessary and unambiguous product of such actions. Fear, in other words, is always only understood as the public’s response to the terrorist activities. Moreover, the modalities of fear are never explicitly addresses in such studies. The socio-political, epistemic, and practical aspects of ‘the politics of fear’ remain outside the purview of much of

traditional terrorism studies, with its research focus directed at the ‘essence’, i.e., the inherent properties and characteristics of terrorism.⁹ Yet if terrorism is about the incitement of fear for political purposes, we need to replace essence with sense;¹⁰ in other words, we need to focus more closely on the manifest appearances of ‘fear-ful’ events, acts, and practices as they direct themselves towards sensual experiences of the targeted, terrorized, audience. Fear, after all, does not refer to an ontological essence, but to particular sensual or phenomenal experiences. Put simply, essences are not frightful, sense experiences are.

A second methodological shift concerns the range and direction of our research. In order to fully grasp the everyday lived experiences of terror, we need to expand the scope of our investigation to include state practices that are supposedly implemented in response to terrorist threats or actions and through which such lived experiences are mediated and structured. The incitement of fear, in other words, is not the exclusive prerogative of terrorism; rather, terrorist acts can be understood as part of a ‘politics of fear’, or of a contest over the sovereign monopoly over fear. Because this contest feeds into the issue of the sovereign monopoly over violence, and as this monopoly encompasses the decision over life and death, terrorism and counter-terrorism need to be understood as a contestation over political sovereignty and community.¹¹ Within this contest, states adapt terrorist strategies – ‘*il faut opérer en partisan partout où il y a des partisans*’¹² – or rather, states revert to the terror that is constitutive of the order they create. If we recognise the contest over political legitimacy, agency, and order that is involved in terrorism and counter-terrorism, operating *en partisan* is the necessary response of the challenged state to the terrorists’ contestation of its monopoly over the incitement of fear. Counter-terrorism is thus not a strategy to fight and disable the threat of terrorism and to alleviate the fear it produces; rather within the context of this analysis, it is part of the attempt of the state to assert its control over the politics of fear by mediating and controlling this fear for its own purposes, chief amongst which is the establishment of the very legitimacy of its counter-terrorism measures.

In order to study these instantiations of terror and the incitement of fear, what is called for is what can loosely be called a ‘critical phenomenology’. Such a method focusses on the empirical practices, phenomena, and experiences that operate within this contest. A phenomenology is required to understand and investigate the appearances and manifestations of fear and its incitement as they appear within the life-world of (in this case US) citizens. As argued above, fear is a sensual response and thus reacts to the phenomenal, and not the essential or metaphysical, reality of terrorism. Definitions of terrorism (and counter-terrorism) don’t incite fear, the lived experience of it does. Secondly, and crucially, such a phenomenological method needs to be critical. The mere description of the phenomena as such will of course not do, given the deeply political nature of the subject. The problematization of the structures of power and interest underlying the phenomenology of terror and the incitement of fear needs to be part and parcel of the analysis. How the lived experience of terror/ism is structured through particular state practices, how governmental practices influence and manage the public’s experience of terror

is therefore a central element of this investigation. This does move the analysis away from a strictly descriptive one, but it gains the ability to critically reflect on the political context of terrorism and the 'politics of fear'. Moreover, the present analysis foregoes the usual focus of phenomenological approaches on the first-person point of view and related cognitive, psychological, or anthropological mechanisms. This is not to say that such question cannot or should not be raised within terrorism studies. However, given this chapter's focus on state strategies of power and public tactics of resistance, the political structuring and managing of everyday life experiences takes precedent over the individualized perspective of traditional phenomenology.

Overall, what is offered in this chapter is an analytical and methodological supplement to traditional studies of terrorism, moving the focus from the definition of terrorism to an empirical description of one example of its experienced reality in everyday life. Moreover, this chapter explicitly seeks to avoid the statist commitment underlying much of conventional terrorism studies. With the legitimacy of the state and its counter-terrorism practices usually settled by definitional *fiat*, such approaches make a critical investigation into the role of the state itself and the politics of fear virtually impossible. As noted above, the assumption that fear is the direct and unmediated outcome of terrorist actions, rather than the product of representational and mediating political practices by states militates against the critical phenomenological approach advocated in this chapter.¹³

Terror, Fear, and Time

How do we conceptualize the relationship between terror, fear, and time? The question emerges because fear, unless it manifests itself as a clinical phobia, is usually an ephemeral, temporary phenomenon, something to overcome, rather than to perpetuate. Yet within the context of contemporary terrorism and counter-terrorism in general, and the War on Terror since 9/11 in particular, fear needs to be maintained, indeed made permanent, for terror and counter-terror to have any effect.

In a remarkable interpretation of 9/11, Jacques Derrida invests this ability to make fear permanent within this Event itself.

The ordeal of the event has as its tragic correlate not what is presently happening or what has happened in the past but the precursory signs of what threatens to happen. It is the future that determines the unappropriability of the event, not the present or the past. ...

We are talking about a trauma, and thus an event, whose temporality proceeds neither from the now that is present nor from the present that is past but from an im-presentable to come ... [T]his weapon is terrifying because it comes from the to-come, from the future, a future so radically to come that it resists even the grammar of the future anterior. ...

There is traumatism with no possible work of mourning when the evil comes from the possibility to come of the worst, from the repetition to come – though worse.¹⁴

For Derrida, then, the traumatic nature of 9/11 suspends any temporality of terror and fear. Or rather, it occupies and contaminates our future, folding it into the experience of the event, and re-constituting it as a time of ever-looming re-iteration and repetition of terror. The fear incited by 9/11 deprives the future of any *telos*, purpose, or direction. The Future Perfect (or Anterior) is no longer a relevant tense, as all notion of what shall be, of what we shall have accomplished, is erased by the fear of a renewed *éclat*, of another, even worse attack. 9/11 maintains the grip of fear through a traumatization that cannot be erased through ‘work of mourning’. We remain spellbound and immobilized by expectation of worse to come, by the knowledge that such terror will happen again. Trauma without end works to keep the fear of terrorism alive.

Except that the worse never happened, and that other attacks on the US mainland prove Marx’s adage that history repeats itself, ‘first time as tragedy, second time as farce’.¹⁵ None of the post-9/11 attacks could reproduce the drama and the terror of that event. Perhaps the responses to the failed attack on 25 December 2009 when Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a 23-year-old Nigerian, attempted to bring down flight NW 253 on its approach to Detroit International Airport demonstrate this point best. The excited chatter about a renewed AQ threat soon gave way to a more measured discussion of appropriate security measures at airports, the failure of the CIA to intercept the perpetrator, and a derisive and satirical discussion of the particular (and unsuccessful) tactics of the latter of hiding the bomb in his underwear and close to his genitals: ‘So even if the bomb works, there’s gonna be 72 very disappointed virgins’.¹⁶

Arguably then, the trauma of 9/11 faded over time. What from the perspective of the weeks immediately after the event, when the interview with Derrida was conducted, seemed plausible, looks decisively problematic from the perspective of today. By now, the temporality of allegedly timeless terror can be appreciated, as can its performative nature. Within the War on Terror, fear needs to be re-incited systematically and continuously, the trauma of the Event needs to be repeatedly induced in order to justify the continuous material and immaterial costs of this War. And this process is primarily conducted by the state and its counter-terrorism strategies.

In-stating Fear

Terrorism, or rather the enactment of terror should be considered a radical expression of political violence and war. According to Carl Schmitt, political order is based on the production and performance of an intense antagonism that divides and thereby constitutes communities.¹⁷ Within this context, terror is but the ultimate expression

of such an ontogenetic performance and cannot be reduced to a practice of 'non-state' actors. As William Connolly observes, the 'territory' of a nation-state is often understood to refer to 'terra', i.e., the earth or land on which it rests. Yet, as he points out, the OED suggests that the form of the word 'territory' derives from 'terrere': to frighten, with territory being 'a place from which people are warned off'.¹⁸

This etymology suggests that terror and fear are therefore always a constitutive part of any political order.¹⁹ Terror and counter-terror are therefore best understood as a contest over the legitimacy of extent vs. imagined orders.²⁰ As such, this contest mobilizes and incites the state's ability to re-assert the monopoly over terror and fear by re-asserting the constitutive decision between friend and enemy (or, in the context of the War on Terror, between friend and foe). Whilst terrorist attacks are usually discrete events and thus can only incite 'momentary' fear, the state has the possibility to institutionalize the re-iterative incitement of fear through its structures of governance. In this respect, the War on Terror has seen the creation of a vast and diverse set of fear inducing mechanisms. From dramatized narrations about terrorists, to the creation of detention centres such as Bagram and Guantanamo Bay in which the detainees become the object of the 'embodiment' of terrorism, to more mundane mechanisms such as electronic signs on US interstate highways requesting information about 'anything suspicious', and random roadblocks and road closures in US cities, the reality of 'terror' becomes a state-controlled simulacrum of the original terrorist threat. The focus of this chapter is on one of these mundane mechanisms: the colour-coded Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS) that was in effect in the USA from 2002 to 2011.

Colour-Coding Terror

The HSAS was established by Homeland Security Presidential Directive 3 on 11 March, 2002. Its official goal was

to provide a comprehensive and effective means to disseminate information regarding the risk of terrorist acts to Federal, State, and local authorities and to the American people. Such a system would provide warnings in the form of a set of graduated Threat Conditions that would increase as the risk of the threat increases.²¹

There are overall five Threat Conditions, identified by a description and respective colour.

From lowest to highest, the levels and colours are:

1. ➤ Low = Green
2. ➤ Guarded = Blue
3. ➤ Elevated = Yellow
4. ➤ High = Orange
5. ➤ Severe = Red



Figure 6.1 Homeland Security Advisory System.

The colour scheme is graphically structured as follows:²² against a dark blue, slightly veined background, five square colour blocks are compiled on top of each other, from 'Low/Green' at the bottom to 'Severe/Red' on top. The scheme is given official status by the two-line heading 'Homeland Security Advisory System' on top of the image, set off from the rest of it by two thin red lines above and below these title lines. Two to the left of the title lines, the official seal of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is placed.

The purpose of this 'Colour-coded Threat Level System' is to 'communicate with public safety officials and the public at-large through a threat-based, colour-coded system so that protective measures can be implemented to reduce the likelihood or impact of an attack'.²³

The information contained in the image is provided on two levels, and through two media. Firstly, the Threat Level within each colour block is further elucidated through a (somewhat redundant) description. 'Low' entails a 'low risk

of terrorist attacks', 'Guarded' a 'general risk', 'Elevated' a 'significant risk', 'High' a 'high risk', and 'Severe' a 'severe risk' of such attacks. Secondly, the linguistic information provided is supplemented by a colour code that employs the traditional chromatic scheme based on colour temperature. The cold green supplements the Low message, with an increasing severity of threat indicated by blue, yellow, orange and red colours, respectively. Text and colour are employed in a mutually reinforcing fashion. Information contained in the image therefore appeals both to the cognitive as well as emotive faculty of the viewer.

It remains, however, unclear what the precise status of the declaration of a particular threat level is. There are no binding measures to be taken; the Presidential Directive that establishes HSAS only stipulates that federal agencies and departments 'should consider ... general measures'.²⁴ And as Philip Bobbitt points out, only one alert in which the level was raised from Yellow to Orange was ever accompanied by any specific measures. At this time, '16 international flights were cancelled and scores of passengers interviewed'.²⁵

As for the general public, however, no further information about the sources, reliability, or content of the respective information behind the raising and lowering of the threat level is provided. In view of this, as early as in September 2009, an Advisory Council established by the new US administration under President Obama, came to the conclusion that the 'system's ability to communicate useful information in a credible manner to the public is poor. Significant rethinking of how to communicate to this audience is warranted'.²⁶

Indeed, as conceded here by the new administration, without any reference to further information, the colour chart and the threat level announcements become mobile signifiers, detached from any fixed signified. In fact, the system appears as completely self-referential: raising the threat level to Orange simply means that it is no longer at Yellow, and vice versa. The information the Advisory System provides in this graphic fashion is therefore completely contained within the chart itself. Terror and fear are thereby re-coded as a sensitivity to such self-referential changes. They do not refer to past and/or future terrorist events or possible threats; rather, fear is incited precisely through the erasure of manifest threats. Providing purely symbolic warnings rather than 'act-able' information, the colour charted threat levels turn an ontological threat (society vs. its enemies) into an epistemological threat: the public audience does not know what threatens it, or in what way; and this itself incites, or is supposed to incite, epistemic fear.²⁷ Fear is induced not through the knowledge of a concrete threat or enemy, but through the very lack of such knowledge. Rather than providing information about the terrorist threat, the administration in effect withholds such information. Yet such a strategy has peculiar effects. Via the sovereign strategy of the Advisory System and its self-referential colour chart, fear of terrorism becomes the fear of the unknown. To use a phrase coined by Donald Rumsfeld, the HSAS produces the knowledge that there are known unknowns.²⁸

'But an objectless fear is an unresolvable fear. No one can fight or flee what he cannot identify or know'.²⁹ As critical readings of sovereignty and statehood have elucidated, the onto-genesis of the state is tied to its ability to provide an object of

fear: the enemy, the other, the outside. Order is fashioned out of the foundational *coup de force* of sovereignty by instituting this ontological distinction and by making it the basis of an ontic order. Yet the self-referential nature of the colour scheme ‘conceals’ rather than reveals the enemy; ontological security is denied, and the audience is cast back into the (pre-state) state of ‘Hobbesian fear’. Hence, within the War on Terror, the American public is denied political agency through this sovereign strategy. Whilst the Advisory System involves the public in the War on Terror, at the same time, it excludes it from it in a crucial fashion. To ‘know’ the terrorist threat remains the prerogative of the sovereign state, whilst the same threat remains ‘unknown’ to the public.³⁰

In this context it is crucial to note that the two lowest levels of the colour scheme, ‘Green/Low’ and ‘Blue/Guarded’, have never been mobilized since the implementation of HSAS in 2002. This fact further adds to the sense of a suspended order and the ensuing normalcy of exceptional circumstances. A reality or life-world without a significant terrorist threat is still depicted as a conceivable possibility on the scheme, yet at the same time, it is effectively excluded from political reality. Thus, rather than incorporating the possibility of terrorist attacks into a changed political reality, the colour scheme re-iterates and institutionalizes the exceptionality of circumstances on the symbolic level, whilst withholding any relevance on the empirical level of a ‘threat-less’ state of affairs. Thus, the exception *as exception* becomes the norm; against the backdrop of the green and blue threat levels, it never sheds its exceptional status. The strategy of heightened threat levels, whilst constantly operating against the backdrop of the normality of a green or blue state of affairs, in practice excludes such normality by confining the actual scope of the colour scheme to Yellow and above. As a sovereign strategy, the HSAS thus confines the political space of the War on Terror to the limits of the exception.

The particular management of fear that this sovereign strategy entails also re-asserts the state’s monopoly over the incitement of fear. Within this strategy, power and knowledge are intertwined in a Janus-faced fashion: whilst the designation of threat levels indicates the state’s knowledge of the threat it faces, this knowledge is at the same time withheld from society and its citizens. The implementation of the HSAS therefore has a similar effect as the event of 9/11 has in Derrida’s interpretation: it abolishes the Future Perfect by the constant anticipation of ‘worse things to come’, of another raising of the threat level without explanation, and by representing, yet at the same time excluding, the normality of ‘Green/Low’ and ‘Blue/Guarded’. But what Derrida saw vested within the event itself, is now produced through the constant state-controlled deployment of a self-referential mechanism.

As a sovereign strategy, the Advisory System displays a number of peculiarities. Firstly, whilst it does establish a sovereign space from which a particular set of relations with society and its enemies is defined and managed, these relationships themselves do not transform the uncertainty of terrorism into a ‘readable space’.³¹ No particular discourse emerges from this strategy that would produce, impose, and structure a definitive understanding of terrorism and its relationship with society.

Secondly, whilst de Certeau emphasizes the panoptic practice involved in such strategies, through which ‘the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured’,³² whatever the sovereign’s eye sees and measures is not shared with the public. The latter is literally and ironically kept in the dark via a self-referential colour scheme that signifies nothing beyond its own code. It therefore reproduces terror as the fear of the unknown and unknowable, depriving the public of the inherent right of citizens to assess, review, and critique their government’s performance and practice. However, it is precisely this particular structure of HSAS as a means to manage fear that made possible political counter-readings.

Counter-Readings

There is unfortunately no systematic research into the effects of the HSAS in terms of public perceptions of terror and of behavioural adjustments.³³ Thus, exactly what practical consequences the colour scheme had remains unclear.

On the other hand, a number of observers, even within the US administration itself, have noted that HSAS has become the object of criticism and derision.³⁴ The colour scheme itself has been imitated, parodied and satirized in a number of ways, and its use criticized as politically motivated. The latter accusations gained further credence with the publication of Tom Ridge’s account of his tenure as the first Secretary of Homeland Security, *The Test of Our Times*, in which he describes how then Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld and Attorney General John Ashcroft pressured him to raise the threat level shortly before the 2004 Presidential Elections.³⁵ Rumours and accusations about such partisan political uses of HSAS had been frequently voiced in the media, and satirized in Comedy Central’s ‘fake news programme’ *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* which would turn into one of the most effective forums for criticising the Bush Administration’s handling of the War on Terror in general, and the HSAS in particular.³⁶

Beyond TV’s *Daily Show*, the Internet has been a repository for spoofs and parodies of the Advisory System and its colour chart. The first example examined in detail here is taken from a collection of political jokes, gathered at ‘about.com’.³⁷ Its ‘trick’ is simple enough: it expands the original five threat levels to 11, and adds additional colours to the scheme, such as light blue, teal, pale orange, magenta, and crimson. This parody therefore emphasizes and exaggerates the ‘colourful’ nature of the original scheme, depriving it in the process of any residue of seriousness. A rainbow-like collection of colours produces the impression of a decorative rather than administrative scheme. Furthermore, the chart produces a (perhaps intended) graphical reference to the rainbow colours used by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) movement, thus importing its often anti-governmental stance and counter-cultural aesthetic into this tactic, and in the process undermining the masculinity of the counter-terrorist narrative.³⁸



Figure 6.2 HSAS in Rainbow Colours.

On the textual level, the parody scheme plays with and underscores the original scheme's meaningless as well as self-referential nature. The 'threat levels' are now listed as follows: 'Moderate' – 'Ambiguous' – 'General' – 'Defensive' – 'Hightened' – 'High' – '*Really High*' – 'Very High' – '*Really Very High*' – 'Extremely Severe' – 'Ultra Platinum Severe'. Most of these categories are obviously meaningless in providing any relevant information about terrorist threats, thereby amplifying the lack of any signification within the HSAS. Additionally, the scheme's section from 'High' to '*Really Very High*' satirizes and exaggerates the self-referential nature of the original scheme's categories. Moreover, even the potential meaning found in this internal signification becomes undermined, for it is blatantly unclear precisely

what difference there is between ‘Really High’ and ‘Very High’ and ‘Really Very High’. Finally, the ‘ultimate’ threat level of ‘Ultra Platinum Severe’ introduces a category familiar from credit cards or airlines’ frequent flyer programmes, thus purposefully conflating levels of social threats with levels of social status. Overall, then, this parody of the HSAS dissolves the original scheme into a fluent and ambiguous play of explicit and implicit significations, which reflect, and in a sense amplify the ‘unknown’ nature of the purpose of the Advisory System. The message of the System can mean anything and therefore nothing.

The second example, published by the satirical online newspaper *The Onion* under the fake headline ‘Iraq Adopts Terror Alert System’, transposes the HSAS to ‘Iraq’ and adjusts the colour scheme and its textual designations of the different threat levels to the gruesome reality of Iraqi society in 2004.³⁹

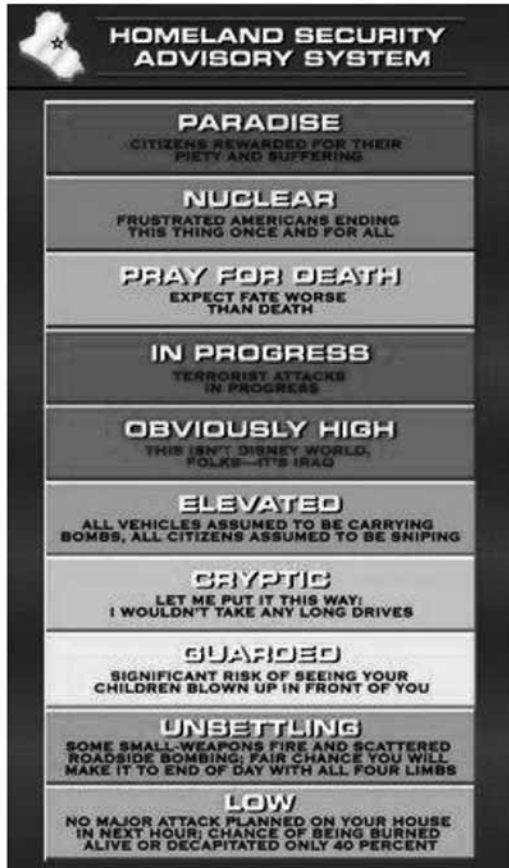


Figure 6.3 HSAS Iraqi Version. Copyright © 2004 Onion Inc. All rights reserved. Originally published in Onion.com. Reprinted by permission.

The doubling of 'threat levels' on this chart to ten again adds to the sense of arbitrariness in the designation of the original five in the HSAS. Moreover, the expansion to 10 levels allows for the entry of more satirical textual dramatization of the reality 'on the ground' in 'Iraq' one year after the US led invasion. Contrary to the American original, even the 'Low' level makes explicit reference to 'major attacks' and the chance of being 'burned alive or decapitated'. In other words, due to the American invasion, even the green 'low' condition depicting 'normality' entails the reality of a level of violence that a normal society cannot sustain. Contrary to the original HSAS, the 'Iraqi' exception has become the norm *as the norm*.

The colour scheme's texts effectively use Western stereotypes and colloquialisms in the designation and definition of the threat levels. Interestingly enough, they actually refer to particular (if satirically rendered) conditions in 'Iraq'. Contrary to the US administration's Advisory System, this colour scheme does refer explicitly to an external condition, albeit an imagined, satirized and parodied one. The spoof of Western preconceived notions and clichés is epitomized in the top two threat levels: a reference to the frequent expression of public exasperation with the war ('nuke them all'), and a reference to Paradise where Muslims supposedly receive their rewards for 'their piety and suffering'. This particular 'adaptation' of the HSAS therefore does a 'double take' on its audience: it parodies the very format of the colour scheme in its (alleged) adaptation by the Iraqi government, and it invests it with a satirical, indeed sarcastic text that echoes the American public discourse on Iraq.

The final 'trick' of this colour scheme, and perhaps the best expression of its subversive wit, consists in the (alleged) adaptation of a 'Terror Alert System' in Iraq as a response to the terror inflicted upon Iraq by the American response to its own raised level of terrorist threat. Presented by President Bush as a crucial theatre in the Global War on Terror, Iraq became subject to a campaign of terror, made possible by an inept and incompetent American occupation of a country that prior to 2003 never had any relationship with al-Qaeda. In other words, the original Advisory System is now satirically and critically turned against the threat that the American government itself created in Iraq.

The third and final example discussed in this chapter, a 'culinary' parody of the HSAS, appeared in response to then Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff's, remarks in a *Chicago Tribune* interview in July 2007 that he had a 'gut feeling' that al-Qaeda might strike against the USA during the summer months.⁴⁰ Taken the concept of 'gut feeling' literally, this rendition of the HSAS links the level of the terrorist threat to the threat posed by different sausage-centred fast foods to the digestive and intestinal health of the human organism. The 'low risk' is thus associated with the culinarily insipid, but dietarily commendable experience of the 'Tofu Pup', whilst the 'severe risk of terrorist attacks' is conveyed by the gastro-intestinal hazard of a 'Danger Dog'. The latter concept refers to a 'hot dog, wrapped in a piece of bacon, fried in oil and served on a bun with grilled onions and chili sauce'. First sold by often unlicensed street vendors in Tijuana, Mexico, the name 'danger dog' refers as much to the heart attack-inducing combination of

ingredients, as to the usually low quality of the latter, which can give consumers a fairly unpleasant feeling in the 'gut'.⁴¹

What this parody takes on is of course the peculiar notion that a 'gut feeling' can serve as a compelling analysis and assessment of terrorist threats. The concept 'gut feeling' connotes baselessness, lack of clear evidence, and reliance on instinct rather than intellect. The trick of this culinary parody is therefore to illustrate the preposterousness and banality of an individual(ized) assessment of the likelihood of a terrorist attack with the individual, banal (if very disagreeable) experience of an upset stomach.

Similar to the 'Iraq' spoof, the culinary satire also provides an external signified. Whilst 'Iraq' undermines the political credibility of the HSAS by transposing it to the Iraqi experience as being victimized by US state terror, the 'sausage' version undermines the political standing of the Secretary of Homeland Security, i.e., the very person that is supposed to represent the US administrations commitment to a meaningful and effective policy of counter-terrorism.



Figure 6.4 HSAS as 'Gut-Feeling'. Copyright © 2007 Condé Nast Publications. All rights reserved. Originally published in Wired.com. Reprinted by permission.

Conclusion: Exceptional Resistance?

All three satirical renditions of the HSAS's colour chart point to an interesting, inadvertent, outcome of the Advisory System's implementation: it diminishes, rather than incites, fear, and it grants political agency to those who resist it. As a sovereign strategy, the HSAS has a significant and debilitating flaw: it never provided 'a comprehensive and effective means to disseminate information' to the American public, as stated at its inception. Thus it ultimately fails to control and structure the space it is supposed to occupy and govern. Instead, it surrenders this political space to the artistic tricks of comedians and jesters, to the tactics of parody, satire, and ridicule. Rather than maintaining the initial trauma of 9/11 via the constant conjuring up of a 'Hobbesian fear' within a pliable and docile populace, the failure of this sovereign strategy invited and arguably facilitated the overcoming of this trauma.

The very lack of any reference, of any 'signified' in terms of concrete information about potential terrorist attacks, opened a space for ridicule, critique and opposition. In the absence of any such reference, the public, bloggers, comedians, and fake news anchors are free to fill the void with their own imagination. Two effects are most striking here: the direct implication of the US administration in the incitement of fear, and the banalization of fear itself through the tactics of the comic resistance movement. Far from re-producing and institutionalising the production of fear, the HSAS becomes a tool to do the work of mourning that Derrida considered to be impossible. The critically and satirically refracted versions of HSAS created a space of resistance to the official state-controlled discourse on terror and fear and thus allowed the public to 'process' the experience of 9/11, thereby rejecting the constant instrumentalization of terror in the political sphere.⁴²

The response of the Obama administration to this crisis of meaning regarding the HSAS lends further support to this argument. In October 2009 Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano made the first announcement about an impending review of the Advisory System on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, the very fake news show that had been one of the primary sites of satirical resistance to the System. As she explained, the review would deal above all with the HSAS's ability (or lack thereof) to 'communicate anything to the American people'.⁴³ There is a double recognition of the effectiveness of the public tactics deployed against the HSAS discernable here. Firstly, Napolitano's appearance on the *Daily Show* acknowledges the influence of this TV programme and its role in providing an outlet for the satirical deconstructions of the Advisory System. Secondly, the announcement of a review of the System in terms of its communicative capabilities recognises and grants the critics' main point: that the HSAS was a self-referential and for the public a profoundly meaningless mechanism. Popular tactics, the 'aesthetics of "tricks"' (artists operations)' and an 'ethics of tenacity'⁴⁴ seem to have prevailed over the imposition of constant, epistemic fear.

In April 2011, the HSAS was replaced by the National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS), which did away with the notorious colour scheme that had

attracted so much ridicule. More crucially, however, the new System introduces significant changes to the management of fear.⁴⁵ Firstly, there are now only two threat levels: Imminent Threat Alert which '[w]arns of a credible, specific, and impending terrorist threat against the United States', and Elevated Threat Alert, which '[w]arns of a credible terrorist threat against the United States'. Given the experience with the previous system, the Department of Homeland Security emphasizes that

These alerts will include a clear statement that there is an imminent threat or elevated threat. Using available information, the alerts will provide a concise summary of the potential threat, information about actions being taken to ensure public safety, and recommended steps that individuals, communities, businesses and governments can take to help prevent, mitigate or respond to the threat.

As a sign of the times, citizens can receive alerts via e-mail, Facebook, and Twitter; the DHS also offers widgets and web resources for web developers.⁴⁶

Moreover, the respective alerts will be issued with a specific date when the alert expires. The NTAS thus does not define and depict general conditions as the old one did. The default setting of the System is in fact 'No Threat' – at the time of writing, 'there are no current alerts'. DHS remains only on 'a heightened level of vigilance'.

Compared to the HSAS, where the exception *as exception* became the norm, set off against conceptually available, but empirically unattainable and irrelevant green or blue levels, the NTAS defines the exception as a temporarily limited case that as such re-affirms and re-establishes the normality of a 'no threat' situation. The exception *as exception* remains an exceptional case.

In the absence of the HSAS and its fecund colour scheme, one might expect the comedians to fall silent now. Yet the last word on the abolition of this system and the introduction of NTAS belongs to another 'fake news anchor', Stephen Colbert. In response to Janet Napolitano's announcement that there was no current threat alert, he offered this:

Folks, since the colour code was put into effect in March 2002, we have existed in a national, constant state of semi-hysteria. Suddenly she's sayin' "we can all relax"? Has she never seen a horror movie? The moment you think you're safe is when Ghostface gets you! If we only have two alert levels, I think they should be "It's quiet" [yellow colour block with this text emulating the HSAS appears in background] and "Maybe too quiet" [red colour block with this text emulating the HSAS appears in background].

But folks, if my natural paranoia is no longer validated by a government colour chart, I will accept the new paradigm, and for the first time in nine years, I am going to unclench my sphincter. For America!⁴⁷

Colbert's protestations against the new NTAS, however, also point to the larger context of the politics of fear and terror in post-9/11 US society. The argument and analysis of this chapter need to be placed against this background. To put this bluntly, the USA was, is, and shall remain a country in 'fear', terrorized by delusions of weakness and vulnerability, which are systematically produced and reproduced by commercial news organizations. As a result of this overall successful 'securitization', or rather 'terrorization'⁴⁸ of American society, the government has been able to implement and institutionalize exceptional political measures and spaces that will most likely endure beyond the contemporary context of the War on Terror.

Resistance to this governmentality machine that draws on, and at the same time reproduces, the fear of terrorism, can apparently only articulate itself in localized spaces; it can only operate against its different elements in different, specific locations. The memoirs of former Gitmo detainees, written despite the explicit injunction not to do so, the work of lawyers resisting the abolition of basic legal principles, and the destruction of customers' records in public libraries to avoid one of the provisions of the PATRIOT ACT are but a few examples of such localized strategies.⁴⁹ Taken together, they do not amount to a grand strategy against the governmentality of terror and fear, but the cumulative effect of these tactics, these ruses and tricks, nonetheless has made it more difficult for the US administration to maintain the un-questioned legitimacy of its extra-ordinary measures.

Within this context, the HSAS and its 'deconstruction' through comedy, satire, and public ridicule arguably contributed to a political discourse, in which the complicity of the state in the incitement of fear could at least be made into a subject of debate, and in which the event of 9/11 and the ensuing mourning of the tragedy could take place in a more reflective and at the same time more self-assertive fashion.⁵⁰

As de Certeau reminds us, tactics are 'the art of the weak'. They seize the moment, they use the cracks provided by 'particular conjunctions' of surveillance and power.⁵¹ Yet as the present analysis demonstrates, their weakness might also be their strength. By undermining governmental regimes of truth from within, they do not refer the public to another such regime. Rather, they open spaces for criticism and debate. As such, they are a central element in a democratic society's response to the extra-ordinary experience of terror and counter-terror.

Notes

¹ Scheuer, M. 2005. Coalition Warfare, Part II: How Zarqawi Fits into bin Laden's World Front, *Terrorism Focus* 2(8). Available at: <http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=161&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=238&no_cache=1> [accessed 11 March 2011].

² Cf. Killcullen, D. 2009. *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 28–29.

³ In late 2010 the US administration announced its intentions to discontinue the Advisory System, cf. Schwarz, J. 2010. US to Drop Colour-Coded Terror Alerts, *New York Times*, 24 November. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/25/us/25colors.html> [accessed 4 March 2011].

⁴ de Certeau, M. 1988. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 36; emphasis in original.

⁵ de Certeau, *Everyday Life*, 36.

⁶ de Certeau, *Everyday Life*, 26.

⁷ de Certeau, *Everyday Life*, 37.

⁸ Cf. Hoffman, B. 2006. *Inside Terrorism*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

⁹ For an exception to this pattern from a sociological point of view, see Furedi, F. 2007. *Invitation to Terror: The Expanding Empire of the Unknown*. London and New York, NY: Continuum.

¹⁰ Deleuze, J. 2004. *Desert Islands and Other Texts*. Los Angeles, CA and New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 16.

¹¹ Behnke, A. 2011. Recognising the Enemy: Terrorism as Symbolic Violence, in *The International Politics of Recognition*, edited by E. Ringmar and Th. Lindemann. Boulder CO: Paradigm Publishers.

¹² Schmitt, C. 1995. *Theorie des Partisanen. Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 20.

¹³ To the extent that representations and mediations of terrorism are problematized, such studies usually focus on the role of mass media and not the state.

¹⁴ Derrida, J. 2003. Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides – A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror. Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, edited by G. Borradori. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 96–7.

¹⁵ Marx, K. 1852. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm> [accessed 11 March 2011].

¹⁶ Stewart, J. 2010. Terror 2.0 by Yemen. Segment of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. 4 January. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-january-4-2010/terror-2-0-by-yemen> [accessed: 11 March 2011].

¹⁷ Schmitt, C. 1996. *Der Begriff des Politischen. Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.

¹⁸ OED (1989) Entry for 'territory' [etymology]. Available at: online edition <http://dictionary.oed.com>; Connolly W. 1995. *The Ethos of Pluralization*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, xxii.

¹⁹ Nobody understood this better than the author of the modern state, Thomas Hobbes. Convinced that the laws of nature are contrary to our natural passions, any Covenant and any order requires 'some coercive Power to compel men equally to the performance of their Covenants, by the terror of some punishment, greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their Covenant'. Hobbes, Th. 1904. *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiasticall and Civill*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 97; cf. 119.

²⁰ Kochi, T. 2009. *The Other's War. Recognition and the Violence of Ethics*. London: Birkbeck Law Press, 213.

²¹ DHS. 2002. Homeland Security Presidential Directive 3: Homeland Security Advisory System. Available at: http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/laws/gc_1214508631313.shtm [accessed: 11 March 2011].

²² DHS. 2009a. Homeland Security Advisory System. Available at: http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/Copy_of_press_release_0046.shtm [accessed 12 March 2011].

²³ DHS, Homeland Security Advisory System.

²⁴ DHS. 2002. Homeland Security Presidential Directive 3: Homeland Security Advisory System. Available at: http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/laws/gc_1214508631313.shtm [accessed: 11 March 2011].

²⁵ Bobbitt, Ph. 2009. *Terror and Consent. The Wars for the Twenty-First Century*. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 259.

²⁶ DHS. 2009b. Homeland Security Advisory Council. Homeland Security Advisory System. Task Force Report and Recommendations, 1. Available at: http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/hsac_task_force_report_09.pdf [accessed 12 March 2011].

²⁷ Blits, J. 1989. Hobbesian Fear. *Political Theory* 17(3), 417–31.

²⁸ Rumsfeld, D. 2002. DoD News Briefing – Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers, US. Department of Defence. 12 February. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2636> [accessed: 4 March 2011].

²⁹ Blits, Hobbesian Fear, 425.

³⁰ This analysis contradicts Furedi, who conceptualizes terrorism, also following Rumsfeld, in terms of an ‘unknown unknown’. Terrorism thus becomes part of a terrain ‘for which we have no mental map’; see Furedi, *Invitation to Terror*, 56. However, for terrorism to become a productive element in the formulation of sovereign strategies aiming to manage the politics of fear, one side of the unknown has to be turned into at least a claim to knowing.

³¹ de Certeau, *Everyday Life*, 36.

³² de Certeau, *Everyday Life*, 36.

³³ Cf. Eisenman, D. et al. 2009. Terrorism-Related Fear and Avoidance Behaviour in a Multiethnic Urban Population. *American Journal of Public Health* 99(1), 168–174.

³⁴ Cf. DHS. 2009b. Homeland Security Advisory System. Task Force Report and Recommendations. Available at: http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/hsac_final_report_09_15_09.pdf [accessed 12 March 2011].

³⁵ Hall, M. 2009 Ridge backpedals on pressure to raise terror alert level, *USA Today*, 31 August. [Online]. Available at: http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2009-08-30-tom-ridge_N.htm [accessed: 11 March 2011].

³⁶ On the accusations regarding the political instrumentalisation of the HSAS, see Stewart, J. 2004. Headlines – Terror Warning. Segment of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* [Online 2 August]. Available at: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-august-2-2004/headlines-terror-warning> (accessed: 12 March 2011). The very first spoof of the HSAS on the day of its announcement focussed *inter alia* on the sartorial opportunities the colour scheme presents to Americans to ‘make sure your outfit matches your dread’, and the banality of the colour scheme and its quotidian use in traffic lights and sales price stickers. Stewart, J. 2002a. Headlines – Red Scare. Segment of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. 12 March. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/tue-march-12-2002/red-scare> (accessed: 12 March 2011), and Stewart, J. 2002b. The Colour of Panic. Segment of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. 12 March. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/tue-march-12-2002/the-colour-of-panic> (accessed: 12 March 2011). On the relevance of the *Daily Show* and Jon Stewart on American public opinion, see for instance

Doyle, L. 2008. You can't be serious: How a comedian became the most influential voice in American politics, *The Independent*, 19 August. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/you-cant-be-serious-how-a-comedian-became-the-most-influential-voice-in-american-politics-901828.html> [accessed: 12 March 2011].

³⁷ Available at: <http://politicalhumor.about.com/library/images/blpic-homeland-securityadvisory.htm> [accessed: 12 March 2011].

³⁸ This interpretation is supported in satirical fashion by Stephen Colbert of *The Colbert Report* (a spin-off programme of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* on Comedy Central), and his description of the original HSAS colour scheme as 'the only rainbow that has not been ruined by the gays'. See Colbert, S. 2011. Homeland Security Eliminates Colour-Coded Terror Alert System. Segment of *The Colbert Report*. 28 April. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/383106/april-28-2011/homeland-security-eliminates-color-coded-terror-alert-system> [accessed 8 May 2011].

³⁹ No author. 2004. Iraq Adopts Terror Alert System. *The Onion* [Online, 1 December]. Available at: <http://www.theonion.com/articles/iraq-adopts-terror-alert-system,1258/> [accessed: 11 March 2011]. Re-printed with the permission of the publishers.

⁴⁰ O'Brian, L. 2007. Chertoff's Gut: Al-Qaeda Could Strike This Summer. *WIRED*, 11 July. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2007/07/chertoffs-gut-a/> [accessed: 12 March 2011].

⁴¹ No author. 2011. Entry: Danger Dog. *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia*. (Online). Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danger_dog [accessed 13 March 2011].

⁴² To wit, Rudolph Giuliani's 2008 Presidential campaign imploded not least because of its incessant insistence on 9/11 as the only relevant political topic.

⁴³ Schwartz, US to Drop; Stewart, J. 2009. Janet Napolitano Pt. 1. Segment of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. 12 October. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-october-12-2009/janet-napolitano-pt—1> [accessed: 7 May 2011].

⁴⁴ de Certeau, *Everyday Life*, 26.

⁴⁵ The following description of the NTAS draws on DHS. 2011a. NTAS Public Guide. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.dhs.gov/files/publications/ntas-public-guide.shtm> [accessed 8 May 2011].

⁴⁶ DHS. 2011b. National Terrorism Advisory System. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/ntas.shtm> [accessed 8 May 2011].

⁴⁷ Colbert, S. 2011. Homeland Security Eliminates.

⁴⁸ Terrorization here refers to an enhanced level or intensity of securitization.

⁴⁹ On the latter tactic, see for instance Montclair Township. Undated. Patriot Resolution. [Online]. Available at: http://www.montclairnjusa.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=323:patriot-act-resolution&catid=112:ordinances-a-resolutions&Itemid=281 [accessed: 14 March 2011].

⁵⁰ Cf. the first episode of the *Daily Show* after 9/11, which opened with an emotional, yet funny, monologue by the host Jon Stewart. Stewart, J. 2001. September 11, 2001. Segment of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. 20 September. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-september-20-2001/september-11—2001> [accessed: 14 March 2011].

⁵¹ de Certeau, *Everyday Life*, 37.

Chapter 7

The Friend of My Enemy: al-Qaeda, Iran and the US

Ali Parchami

As international actors the Islamic Republic of Iran and al-Qaeda are both highly controversial. Over the years much debate has been generated around each of them separately whilst, in the aftermath of September 11, many questions have been raised about the possibility and probability of their interaction. For a small minority of Western observers the two are indistinguishable as exemplars of 'Islamism', 'fundamentalism' and 'radicalism'. Both are identified with an extreme form of militant Islam – one which is intrinsically anti-Western in its sentiment and prone to violence in its methodology. Their rhetoric is often regarded as difficult to decipher, challenging to absorb, and contradictory. Each appears determined to perplex its critics and seemingly thrives on confusion – actual as well as metaphorical. Much ambiguity surrounds their internal dynamics and, to some extent, their structure and organization. Yet, despite the acute shortage of objective evidence, many analysts from across the world – officials, scholars and journalists – often speak and write about Iran and al-Qaeda with the confidence of an all-knowing insider: chronicling, with insightful detail, their motivations, objectives, inter-relationships – in short, what makes them tick.

A reading of available public sources provides for a varied and complex picture of the links between the Iranian state and al-Qaeda. One narrative suggests that Iran and al-Qaeda have been cooperating for years as part of a strategic alliance which pre-dates the events of September 11. According to this perspective, the clerical regime has provided al-Qaeda operatives with safe passage and refuge, and at times has actively funded, armed and promoted the 'network' throughout the Middle East. A second narrative – primarily Iranian – distinguishes between Shia Iran and Sunni al-Qaeda, noting that the two actors are ideological rivals with competing objectives in the Middle East. A third approach draws elements from both narratives: whilst it recognizes that Iran and al-Qaeda are not natural bedfellows, and acknowledges the historical animosity between the two, it argues that expediency has encouraged a degree of cooperation based on the Machiavellian proposition that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. In other words, the immediate threat posed by the United States in the Persian Gulf and in Afghanistan has fostered a tentative and limited operational or even strategic collaboration.

This chapter will begin by examining a selection of sources on the alleged links between Iran and al-Qaeda – looking particularly at American and Arab charges of cooperation between the two. Next it will discuss al-Qaeda from an entirely Iranian perspective, focussing on Iran's reading of the Sunni 'network'. This will lead to a wider discussion which will consider the actual likelihood of collusion. The possibility of substantive links between Iran and al-Qaeda will have to be contextualized with reference to three factors: The first variable is 'why' – what would be the Iranian rationale for establishing and maintaining links with al-Qaeda? Second, what form would this relationship take: would it be largely strategic-operational, political, or ideological; would it be a combination of these or none of the above? Third, to what extent, and at what level, would involvement occur on the Iranian side: would it be directed by the highest echelons of the State or managed at a much lower level? All of these points will also have to be assessed against Iran's geopolitical objectives in the region and the idiosyncrasies at the heart of the clerical regime. It will be argued that Iran's foreign policy, and its interaction with actors such as al-Qaeda, cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of the political factions and the institutional fragmentation which is characteristic of the Islamic Republic. The last part of the chapter will, therefore, consider what the function of al-Qaeda might be vis-à-vis the Iranian political labyrinth.

Allegations Linking Iran with al-Qaeda

Although allegations linking the Islamic Republic of Iran with al-Qaeda predate 2001, it was the events of September 11 which piqued interest in the possible connection between the two. Unfortunately, outside of the intelligence community and government circles, information is rather limited and often circumstantial; a fact which might explain the dearth of academic writing on the subject. Indeed, charges of a 'strategic alliance' between Iran and al-Qaeda are confined largely to half a dozen books – whose authors claim to have an insider's knowledge of dealings between Iranian and al-Qaeda operatives – and the media. A notable exception is *The 9/11 Commission Report*, which is perhaps the most important official source, to date, on the possible links between Iran and al-Qaeda.¹ Drawing upon classified US national security documents, hundreds of interviews and eyewitness accounts, *The 9/11 Commission Report* concludes that there was collusion between the Iranian authorities and al-Qaeda. It alleges that in late 1991 or early 1992 Iranian and al-Qaeda operatives met for discussions in Sudan. The outcome was an informal agreement for cooperation to provide support, even if this was limited to training, 'for actions carried out primarily against Israel and the United States.'² Apparently bin Laden was keen for his followers to learn from the experiences of the Lebanese Hezbollah – the Shia militant group closely aligned with Iran – and was particularly interested in the type of attack which had resulted in the death of 241 US Marines in 1983. A senior al-Qaeda delegation was, therefore, dispatched to Iran to receive training in explosives and, in the fall of 1993, al-Qaeda operatives travelled to the

Bekaa Valley in Lebanon for further training in the gathering of intelligence and Hezbollah-style asymmetrical warfare.³

The 9/11 Commission Report makes two further allegations: that following bin Laden's return to Afghanistan from Sudan, Iranian security officials maintained their contacts with senior al-Qaeda figures. The main source for this claim is Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, an al-Qaeda detainee currently held in Guantánamo Bay. Khalid apparently told his American interrogators that 'Iran made a concerted effort to strengthen relations with al Qaeda after the October 2000 attack on the USS *Cole*, but was rebuffed because bin Laden did not want to alienate his supporters in Saudi Arabia'. Khalid and other detainees also 'described the willingness of Iranian officials to facilitate the travel of al Qaeda members through Iran, on their way to and from Afghanistan'. Specifically, they testified that Iranian border inspectors would refrain from placing tell-tale stamps in the passports of such 'travellers'. *The 9/11 Commission Report* speculates that eight to ten of the fourteen Saudi 'muscle' operatives – the future September 11 hijackers – would have travelled in and out of Iran between October 2000 and February 2001; and on one occasion Hezbollah operatives were on the same Beirut to Tehran flight as three of the future hijackers.⁴

The 9/11 Commission reaches several conclusions on Iran's links with al-Qaeda. First, it points to the absence of any evidence that the Iranians, or their Hezbollah proxies, had knowledge 'of the planning for what later became the 9/11 attack'.⁵ Second, it leaves open the possibility of al-Qaeda complicity in the bombing of the Al-Khobar Towers in Dhahran, where 19 Americans were killed and 372 were wounded: 'The operation was carried out principally...by Saudi Hezbollah... Whilst the evidence of Iranian involvement is strong, there are also signs that al Qaeda played some role, as yet unknown.'⁶ Third, it notes that the relationship between Iran and al-Qaeda demonstrates that the Sunni-Shia divide does not preclude sectarian cooperation in terrorist operations.⁷ Many critical questions, however, are left unanswered by *The 9/11 Commission Report*. For example, the document alleges that the earliest contacts between 'Iranian operatives' and al-Qaeda took place in 1991/92. But it is not clear whether these 'operatives' were actually Iranians or Lebanese Arabs who were members of the Hezbollah – the organization which often represents Iranian interests in such matters. If they were Iranian citizens, who were they: agents of the Ministry of Intelligence, or the intelligence branch of the Army, or members of a unit of the *Sepah-e-Pasdaran* (IRGC)⁸ – such as the Quds Force? As we shall see later, these distinctions are the key to understanding the nature of the alleged relationship between Iran and al-Qaeda given that the political and military organization of the Iranian state is quite opaque and its institutional and political fragmentation particularly pronounced.

Nor does *The 9/11 Commission Report* attempt to explain at what level within the clerical regime was contact with al-Qaeda sanctioned: was it at the behest of the Office of Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei – the Supreme Leader and the highest constitutional authority in the Iranian State – or was it authorized by the government of the day – which was headed by President Hashemi Rafsanjani?

Contact could, in fact, have originated with one of the many autonomous *Bonyads* (Foundations), or by mid-ranking operatives, whose actions may have later been approved and encouraged by decision-makers in Tehran. The ambiguity surrounding the level of Iranian involvement with al-Qaeda is underlined by Sayf al-Adl, an al-Qaeda operative, who is quoted as saying that it was 'very easy' for the 'brothers' to travel from Turkey through Iran and on to Afghanistan, because the coordination was with 'sincere individuals', not the Iranian government.⁹ If al-Adl is to be believed, this would suggest that the transit of al-Qaeda operatives in the early noughties was facilitated by sympathizers in Iran, perhaps elements within the clerical regime, but not necessarily by the deliberate actions of the Iranian government. Following from these points, *The 9/11 Commission Report* is also vague as to whether it was Iran or al-Qaeda which initiated the early contacts: it simply relates that Sudan's Islamist leader, Hassan Abd-Allah al-Turabi, hosted a series of meetings to 'persuade Shiites and Sunnis to put aside their divisions and join against the common enemy'.¹⁰

The publication of *The 9/11 Commission Report* generated a flurry of articles in the US media as well as in some Arab countries.¹¹ The same allegations were repeated, occasionally with embellishments, by newspapers, magazines, journals, internet blogs, and by television reports and interviews.¹² A series of books also covered the same ground or claimed to reveal the depth of the relationship between Iran and al-Qaeda. For example, a chapter in journalist Richard Minter's *Shadow War* sets out to expose the 'frightening new alliance' between the Sunni terrorist organization and the world's biggest state sponsor of terrorism.¹³ Minter writes that, in 2002, a seemingly desperate bin Laden appealed to Iran for help: in exchange for refuge and funding, and on the condition that Iran would continue the war against the American-led coalition in Afghanistan – and in Iraq in the event of an invasion – bin Laden pledged to put al-Qaeda at the service of the Iranian authorities. In an audiotape recording supposedly delivered to Ayatollah Khamenei, bin Laden reportedly pledged: 'If I die, my followers will be told to follow you.' Minter adds that the appeal was successful and the Supreme Leader's personal director of intelligence undertook secret negotiations which culminated in the transfer of bin Laden's four wives and eldest son to Iran – where they were put under special protection by the Revolutionary Guard.¹⁴ Minter also contends that in late March 2004 a jointly planned Iranian-al-Qaeda offensive was launched in Afghanistan and Iraq with the intention of destabilizing both countries.¹⁵

In one passage, Richard Minter complains that senior Bush administration officials refuse to discuss intelligence linking Iran with al-Qaeda; and that 'silence' seems to be official US policy on the subject.¹⁶ Publicly US officials have, indeed, been economical about Iran's alleged cooperation with al-Qaeda. Official comments have been largely confined to criticisms of 'hard-line, unaccountable elements of the Iranian regime' facilitating the movement of al-Qaeda fighters from Afghanistan, and Tehran's procrastination in arresting known al-Qaeda operatives in Iran.¹⁷ With little or no illumination provided by officials (American or otherwise), and in the absence of verifiable evidence, the nature of

the relationship between Iran and al-Qaeda has become subject to considerable speculation and innuendo.¹⁸ And herein lies the problem: collectively, the quality of the information available in the public domain, and its analysis, ranges from the seemingly sound to the highly dubious and even the outright spurious. Amongst the latter is Curt Weldon's *Countdown To Terror*.¹⁹ His book is worthy of attention because, at the time of its publication, Weldon was a US Congressman and a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee. By the author's own admission, the main source for his book is an Iranian exile, a former high-ranking member of the Shah's government, who actively seeks the overthrow of the clerical regime.²⁰ Weldon presents, as indisputable facts, this individual's allegations, including the charge that bin Laden was hiding in Iran 'as an honoured guest' whilst American forces vainly searched for him along the Afghan-Pakistan frontier. He and his source also claim that the Iranian regime was to hold a 'terrorist summit' in July-August 2003 which would have included Saddam Hussein, bin Laden, Mullah Omar, and the Afghan warlord Gulboddin Hekmatyar.²¹ This secret organization was an 'Islamic Vatican' of sorts which was created at the behest of bin Laden and held had weekly meetings headed by Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei.²² There are many questionable allegations in Weldon's exposé, but the idea of Saddam travelling to Iran, particularly for a meeting of radical Islamists, leaves one incredulous.

Weldon's book is representative of a body of literature which boasts an insider's knowledge of the workings between Iran and al-Qaeda and yet shows acute naiveté in its analysis of the geopolitical realities of the Middle East or the sectarian nuances of the Muslim world. Similar sources provide impressively detailed accounts of secret meetings between al-Qaeda agents and high-ranking Iranian officials: 'All three of Iran's primary terrorist support groups participated in the planning' of 9/11, with the Quds Force represented by Imad Fayez Mugniyeh. Amongst principal targets were the Pentagon and the headquarters of the CIA.²³ One could ask why Mugniyeh – the Arab head of Hezbollah's special operations directorate – would be representing the Quds Force, the elite unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, in such an important and highly sensitive meeting attended by other senior Iranian officials? But this is a minor concern compared to the author's main allegation that the 9/11 hijackers were merely Iran's proxies and that the whole thing was masterminded by Tehran.²⁴ Likewise Kenneth Timmerman relates that in the event of a threat to Iran's nuclear programme – such as its referral to the UN Security Council – al-Qaeda would launch spectacular attacks against Western interests.²⁵ As with Raymond Snow, Timmerman offers details of secret meetings and claims to expose the insidious arrangement between Tehran and al-Qaeda. Precisely because of our lack of verifiable evidence, no allegation should be dismissed out of hand. Nevertheless, one has to be very sceptical of Weldon, Snow, and others like them who 'expose' secretive 'terrorist summits', where ideological and geopolitical differences miraculously converge, and the said authors somehow have acquired not only the highly classified list of attendees but also the minutes of the meeting which reveal its most intimate and detailed discussions.

The analytical pool on the alleged links between Iran and al-Qaeda might be saturated with sources from the weaker end of the spectrum, but there are also a number of sound works to be drawn upon.²⁶ What distinguishes the ‘good’ from the ‘weak’ is the recognition, by the former, of the limitations imposed by the scarcity of reliable evidence. Their approach is accordingly circumspect – treating allegations with due scepticism whilst demonstrating a sound grasp of the intricacies of the Middle East and the Islamic world, as well as showing an appreciable understanding for Iranian politics and foreign policy. For example, Gary Sick, an Iran expert at Columbia University and a former member of the US National Security Council under the Ford and Carter administrations, is highly sceptical about reports, ‘usually ascribed to anonymous intelligent sources’, which mention ‘a connection between Al Qaeda and some elements in Iran, possibly via Hizballah.’²⁷ Sick argues that whilst ‘low-level tactical’ contacts between Hezbollah and al-Qaeda may have been a possibility, claims of an alliance between Iran and al-Qaeda are baseless – lacking in both evidence and logic.²⁸ Likewise Paul Hastert’s 2003 article asserts that limiting US power in the Middle East may have been a mutual objective, but it would not have been enough to induce Iranian cooperation with al-Qaeda at a political-leadership level. Geopolitically and ideologically, Iran and al-Qaeda had divergent regional aims, including in Iraq and Afghanistan. Conversely, at times their goals coincided operationally and this may have allowed for a very limited strategic cooperation.²⁹ Hastert suggests that based on existing evidence, including interviews with Iranian military defectors, Iran’s relationship with al-Qaeda was largely limited to the intelligence branch of the Revolutionary Guard and not the Iranian government.³⁰

Motives figure prominently in the assessment of Tehran’s possible links with al-Qaeda. The weaker sources merely expand on what has already been said by claiming that Iran and al-Qaeda are both Islamic extremists and natural allies in their hatred of the West. Despite sectarian differences, the ‘unholy alliance’ between Iran and al-Qaeda is built upon the foundation of their mutual opposition to the US, and their determination to overthrow the region’s moderate Arab regimes. Ideologically they might differ in their interpretations of Islam, but they both seek to re-establish a hard-line Islamic order; as such there is some degree of religious convergence.³¹ Ultimately this is a relationship nurtured by ‘personal connections, shared goals and a common enemy’. The ‘War on Terror’, the threat of Iran’s military encirclement by the US-led coalition, and the spectre of emerging democracies in neighbouring Iraq and Afghanistan are offered as further geopolitical reasons for Tehran’s collaboration with al-Qaeda. Iran, they continue, has a track record for avoiding culpability: relying on Arab proxies, such as the Hezbollah, to commit some of its more outrageous acts of terrorism. Collaboration with al-Qaeda fits the same pattern. The Iranians colluded with the Sunni ‘network’ in attacks against the US and pro-Western Arab regimes in the knowledge that al-Qaeda – rather than Iran – would be blamed. Collaboration with al-Qaeda provided Tehran with plausible deniability: before September 11 few in the international community would have believed there could be close cooperation

between the Shia state and bin Laden's radical followers. Tehran could freely collude with al-Qaeda, even provide its leadership with refuge, because it felt confident of its plausible deniability.³²

The more nuanced sources refuse to engage in nebulous speculation. They only analyse Iran's behaviour vis-à-vis developments which have been confirmed by US or Iranian authorities: such as reports that al-Qaeda operatives used Iran as a transit route before September 11. They observe that given Iran's notoriously porous and long borders with Afghanistan it is not inconceivable that some al-Qaeda operatives could have crossed into the Islamic Republic without the knowledge of the authorities.³³ Alternatively, money could have been a reason for Iranian border officials to look the other way – or perhaps even facilitate such transits. It is also likely that hard-line elements within the clerical regime may have seen an opportunity to recruit some of these Sunni radicals and therefore allowed them to reside in Iran under their personal protection.³⁴ The handling of al-Qaeda operatives by the Islamic Republic is a subject of particular interest, as it appears to provide a rare insight into Iranian thinking.³⁵ Iran was suspiciously slow to take action against these individuals: prior to 2003, they and their relatives were allegedly allowed free movement within Iran and were permitted to plan an attack on Saudi Arabia – one of Iran's chief adversaries in the region.³⁶ Only following tip offs and pressure from Washington did the Iranians decide to act. The speed of the ensuing crackdown indicates that al-Qaeda residents in Iran had always been under the watchful eyes of the authorities; and when it suited them, the Iranians moved against them swiftly and ruthlessly.³⁷ Sayf al-Adl later told his American interrogators that 'the steps that the Iranians took against us [in 2003] confused us and aborted 75 per cent of our plan. A large number of young men were arrested... Consequently, there was a need for the departure of Abu-Mus'ab [Al-Zarqawi] and the brothers who remained free'.³⁸ In the event hundreds of al-Qaeda members were rounded up – reportedly up to 500 – a development which was widely reported in the West and confirmed by Tehran.³⁹

The sudden incarceration of al-Qaeda members by the Islamic Republic may have been partly influenced by US pressure – Washington's public dismay over the 2003 attacks on Saudi Arabia coincided with its awesome display of power projection in neighbouring Iraq. Nevertheless, the Iranians refused to give in to additional US demands to extradite the detainees to a third country.⁴⁰ A multi-authored report – sponsored by *The Council On Foreign Relations* and, significantly, co-authored by Robert Gates – states that the Iranians viewed their al-Qaeda detainees as bargaining chips: behind the scenes Tehran may have offered them to the Americans in exchange for members of the *Mojahideen-e-Khalq Organization* (MKO), an Iranian opposition group based in Iraq.⁴¹ Expanding upon this line of reasoning, one could surmise that the al-Qaeda detainees also served as an insurance policy: depending on Tehran's requirements, they would be allowed some freedom of action or be stifled; they could be held in captivity or, if necessary, be let loose. Between the mass arrests of 2003 and 2010, there were no official accusations – at least from Washington – of al-Qaeda activity from

within Iran. But in 2010, the Islamic Republic came under renewed US criticism for allegedly 'loosening' its grip on its al-Qaeda detainees.⁴² If true, this is a new and intriguing development, particularly in the light of growing tensions between the Obama administration and Tehran over the latter's nuclear programme and President Ahmadinejad's controversial re-election. But gauging reactions, and speculating about motives, can only provide us with a limited and, at best, skewed perspective. For a more rounded understanding of the possible links between Iran and al-Qaeda, we will now turn to Persian sources.

Iranian Readings of al-Qaeda

Iran's clerical regime is notoriously prone to internal disagreements, divergent tendencies in foreign policy, and a conflicted worldview that is informed by factional allegiances, political and religious ideology, and personal interests. Yet on the question of al-Qaeda, Iranian sources provide a shared narrative. Before examining this narrative, two qualifications have to be made. First, the Iranian media is strictly controlled: not all news outlets are the mouthpieces of the government, but they all represent the opinions of political factions aligned to the clerical regime.⁴³ Second, the Islamic Republic typically refrains from providing a coherent opinion on important international developments: this is partly systemic – the result of factional politics – and partly a reflection of the *modus operandi* of the regime. It is an approach which is rationalized by the belief that the 'global media' is controlled by 'Zionists' and their allies and what is made public will inevitably be twisted by such forces. Political information is therefore a precious and sparse commodity in Iran; and that which is available is frequently grist to the rumour mill. To understand what the Iranian leadership thinks, it is necessary to negotiate one's way through the labyrinth of Iranian politics. But because Iranian sources subscribe to the same narrative on al-Qaeda, the task is less challenging here.⁴⁴ The pronouncements of the Supreme Leader, and references to al-Qaeda in the political section of the sermons at Tehran's Friday Prayers, constitute the most important sources regarding Iran's worldview. The latter are almost always delivered by high-ranking clerics and members of the inner-political elite. Unfortunately, transcripts are not always readily available: Iranian internet sites seldom have functioning archives and any attempt to get hold of information in Iran – even transcripts for Friday Prayers – can be a risky business if it attracts the wrong sort of attention.⁴⁵ Fortunately, their view can be found in the Iranian media which, on matters of foreign policy, invariably takes its cue from the Supreme Leader and his representatives. Newspaper editorials – especially the *Kayhan* with its close link to the Supreme Leader – sometimes provide additional insight into the thinking of the highest echelons of the regime. Curiously, original articles regarding Tehran's foreign relations are few and far between and the Iranian media seldom engages in rebuttals or in-depth debates. The preferred method is to reprint, or repeat on television and radio, articles from Western and Arab sources which

are critical of the Islamic Republic – only to ridicule them; or to give prominence to any remark by a foreign academic, journalist or politician which is critical of Western, and particularly American, policy towards Iran.

Despite these limitations, there is no shortage of Iranian sources linking al-Qaeda with the United States and Saudi Arabia.⁴⁶ Al-Qaeda is regarded as an inextricably American creation and bin Laden as Washington's wayward creature. According to the Iranian narrative, bin Laden and al-Qaeda were an integral part of the United States' strategy in the 1980s during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Core elements of the Afghan Mujahideen and foreign Jihhadiists, including bin Laden, received millions of dollars from the Saudi government, with arms, training and intelligence provided by Pakistan and the CIA, as part of a clandestine operation which was run and overseen by Washington. That much, the Iranians insist, is public knowledge and has been admitted by the Americans. Overtime, the Iranians maintain, bin Laden and his followers became more radicalized and disillusioned with the United States and its allies. To some extent, then, the conflict between Washington and al-Qaeda is about America's strategy 'coming home to roost'. For Iran, the links between al-Qaeda and the United States have two other sinister dimensions. The more controversial is the allegation that bin Laden, knowingly or not had, and continued until his death, to serve American interests in the Middle East and beyond.⁴⁷ The September 11 attacks, Iranian sources contend, were the platform from which the US was able to pursue and implement its long-held ambitions in the Middle East and Central Asia. The Iranian interpretation of September 11 can be characterized as ambivalent: whilst sympathizing with the sense of outrage felt over the deaths of thousands of civilians, the Iranian media reserves the right to scrutinize the 'official US government narrative'. Besides expressing incredulity at the ease by which the September 11 hijackers circumnavigated the different layers of US intelligence and security agencies, the Iranian media regularly refers its audience to the many conspiracy theories associated with 9/11. It also points out that the US government may have had more information about al-Qaeda's attack plans than they are willing to admit. Even if it is accepted that the American authorities were genuinely taken by surprise and shocked by the audacity and scale of what happened on 9/11, it changes little. The geopolitical reality, from Tehran's perspective, is that bin Laden and September 11 provided the US with the pretext to send thousands of troops into the Middle East, Afghanistan and parts of Central Asia. Bin Laden may have been a CIA agent and party to America's grand plans for a post-Cold War new order; or he may be a Wahhabi extremist who is playing into the hands of the 'Great Satan'. The end result is the same.⁴⁸

The second charge put forwards by the Iranians is that although the primary objective of bin Laden and his supporters in the 1980s was to fight the Soviets, he was trained by the Americans – and financed by the Saudis – with Iran in mind. His handlers hoped that, in due course, his brand of extreme Wahhabi ideology could be directed against Iran and the Shia. The Saudis may have been the real culprits, perhaps more so than the Americans, in the initial growth of bin Laden's

‘organization’: it was with their tacit support and encouragement that the Americans first began dealing with bin Laden, no doubt because the Saudi regime viewed him as a useful tool in promoting Wahhabism and as a bulwark against Iran’s influence in Afghanistan. Consequently, Iran has been an early and persistent victim of al-Qaeda terrorism, whilst in Iraq and throughout the rest of the Middle East, it is the Shia who are predominantly subject to al-Qaeda’s brutality. The Americans, and their allies, might appear to be at war with bin Laden and al-Qaeda, but that has not prevented a strategic cooperation against Iran and the Shia. Hence, first in Iraq and now in Yemen, the axis of al-Qaeda, Saudi Arabia and the United States are responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Shia civilians; whilst alongside Iran’s Afghan frontier, Jundullah, an al-Qaeda affiliate has been financed and armed by the Anglo-American⁴⁹ allies to destabilize the Islamic Republic.

During a visit to Afghanistan in 2009, Iran’s President – Mahmoud Ahmadinejad – told reporters at a press conference that the ‘Americans created the terrorists, and have now come 12,000 kilometres to fight their own creation....[The Taliban] gave refuge in Afghanistan to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, a group which was once founded by the Americans themselves.’ Even before Operation Enduring Freedom, ‘the United States had an indirect role in nefarious developments in Afghanistan’.⁵⁰ Hossein Shariatmadari, the chief editor and representative of the Supreme leader at *Kayhan* newspaper, has been equally explicit in linking al-Qaeda with the United States. In an Iranian television documentary about the Taliban-al-Qaeda phenomenon, he casually noted: ‘Mr. bin Laden does not deny at all that he was employed by the CIA’.⁵¹ The programme goes on to say that the roots of al-Qaeda must be sought in Christian Evangelism and in American propaganda:

Christiane Amanpour, the famous CNN reporter...conducted many interviews with the heads of the Taliban, including Osama bin Laden, and ... described them as God’s warriors and freedom fighters. In reality, the conceptual foundation of al-Qaeda terrorism was established with this type of Western propaganda.⁵²

It should be noted that Iranian sources do not always distinguish between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, viewing them both as essentially American creations. They might have different structures, and perform different functions, but both exist to serve American interests. More than any other Iranian source it is Shariatmadari’s *Kayhan* newspaper which regularly repeats the allegation that al-Qaeda was conceived by US and Saudi security services.⁵³ In one article, entitled ‘The Wolf in the Sheepfold is Fighting Terrorism’, *Kayhan* muses that the game of terrorism is funny: sometimes ‘these creations of hegemonic-imperialist powers’ stand up and confront their masters whilst, at other times, behind the scenes, al-Qaeda and US leaders are busily negotiating deals.⁵⁴

The same allegations are repeated, with some variation, by other Iranian sources. For example, an internet news site, which states its unswerving loyalty to the Islamic Republic, provides an in-depth analysis of bin Laden’s

‘organization’. It alleges that al-Qaeda was a joint project conceived by the US and Saudi Arabia, though it was initially financed, organized and managed by Riyadh: ‘It was the Saudis who provided the human resources for al-Qaeda by recruiting operatives from the religious schools they had established in different countries.’⁵⁵ It continues that even though al-Qaeda may have appeared in the 1980s as an independent movement in the war against the Soviet Red Army, in truth it was always in the service of Saudi Arabia and functioned as a key regional tool for the United States. Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US has been seeking ways to preserve the unipolarity of the international system. In the Middle East, the Americans were looking for ‘an energetic and dynamic movement’ which would provide them with a pretext to implement their post-Cold War security doctrines and consolidate their hegemonic grip in the region in the name of fighting terrorism. Al-Qaeda gave Washington the perfect pretext to invade Afghanistan, occupy Iraq, and precipitate wars from Lebanon to Somalia and Yemen in a chain of events that serve its interests. The sham that is the ‘War on Terror’ is exposed by the fact that Washington used al-Qaeda as a justification for the invasion of Afghanistan; yet in Iraq, al-Qaeda’s Salafi terrorists and American soldiers and contractors – like Blackwater – jointly engaged in the massacre of the Shia population and brought about the destabilization of that country. It was al-Qaeda which provided the rationale, and established a suitable international environment, for the United States to extend its hegemonic influence in territories previously out of its reach.⁵⁶

Iranian sources further rationalize that if the geopolitical objectives of the United States and its allies are to be realized in the ‘greater Middle East’, it would be necessary for the Islamic Republic to be brought to heel. Iran, they insist, is the only remaining truly independent Islamic power. Through its defiance, and at great cost to itself, it has successfully thwarted Washington’s hegemonic ambitions in the Persian Gulf area by proving to be impervious to America’s threats and resilient against its dirty tricks and bullying. Thus, al-Qaeda was fashioned, in part, as a blunt instrument against Iran. In an interview, Iran’s former Ambassador to Syria, states that ‘al-Qaeda was created with the very specific aim of confronting the Iranian regime’. Wahhabism, he argues, has two dimensions: from a religious perspective, it is Salafasim; but, politically, its roots go back to British imperialism. It is a movement designed to sow the seeds of division amongst Muslims; and that is why Wahhabis have been roundly protected by Western powers over the course of the past century. Originally employed as a tool against the Ottoman Empire, in more recent times, the movement’s primary target has become the Islamic Republic. Iran’s Islamic Revolution, from its inception, was viewed with consternation by the West: geopolitically it represented a threat to the interests of imperialist powers, whilst, ideologically, it was feared for its capacity to unify the Islamic world. Therefore, the Taliban and al-Qaeda were created with twin aims: on the one hand, to confront and contain Iran’s Islamic regime and, on the other, to present Islam with such a brutal and disagreeable face that it would turn people away from religion.⁵⁷

The *Quds* newspaper, with its ties to the Revolutionary Guard, elaborates on this argument by asserting that the United States, whenever necessary, has used the al-Qaeda brand to further its regional interests. Now it is increasingly utilizing the terror network against Iran. It is not surprising that, despite growing acts of terrorism by al-Qaeda against the Islamic Republic, Washington has been conveniently silent.⁵⁸ Iranian sources are particularly keen to point out that, over the past decade, al-Qaeda's top henchmen have relentlessly threatened Iran. In a series of video broadcasts, Ayman Al-Zawahiri – allegedly bin Laden's right-hand man – has denounced the Islamic Republic as an ally of the 'crusaders'. Claiming that Iranian policies are responsible for the Christian 'invasion of Muslim lands', he has described Iran as the United States' partner in crime.⁵⁹ Other al-Qaeda leaders have also singled out Iran and the Shia – characterizing them as a bigger and more immediate threat to 'Islam' than the United States and its coalition allies. The depth of this hatred can be seen in a letter from Abu-Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi to bin Laden.⁶⁰ One Iranian newspaper is categorical about what it means:

The enmity of the Wahhabis is primarily with the Shia... al-Qaeda has announced time and again that their real enemy is not the Americans and the Israelis but the Shia. This positioning against the Shia and the Islamic Republic is taking place at a time when the Americans have occupied Iraq and Afghanistan under their imperialist regime. The cooperation of the Saudis with the Americans and the Israeli occupiers of Islamic lands is becoming more and more apparent.⁶¹

This is why, according to Iranian sources, al-Qaeda affiliates inside and outside of the Middle East have pledged war against the Islamic Republic. Hence, a North African branch of the organization threatened Iran with reprisals for incarcerating Osama bin Laden's relatives; and Saeed al-Shahri, an al-Qaeda leader in the Arabian peninsula, announced that he and his followers were preparing for a jihad against the Iranians – warning of an impending Iranian invasion of the holy land to capture Mecca and Medina.⁶²

The Iranian media maintains that the Islamic Republic was in fact the earliest target of al-Qaeda's barbarity and Iranians – along with the Shia – have suffered more at the hands of these Salafis than any other nationality or religious group.⁶³ al-Qaeda has perpetrated many acts of terrorism against Iran, with the Jundullah⁶⁴ – its affiliate – shedding the blood of hundreds of innocent Iranians.⁶⁵ Tehran not only claims that Jundullah is a branch of al-Qaeda, but it also accuses the United States and Britain of direct involvement in supporting the Sunni insurgency. It alleges that American and British forces provide arms and financial assistance to the Jundullah, even though they are aware of its direct connections with al-Qaeda.⁶⁶ After a particularly vicious suicide bombing campaign in October 2009 – during which scores of Iranian military commanders and Shia tribal leaders were killed – General Gholam-Reza Soleimani of the Revolutionary Guard publicly accused Washington of having links with the Jundullah and proceeded to characterize the movement as an al-Qaeda affiliate.⁶⁷

Nor has it gone unnoticed in Iran that foreign sources appear to confirm these allegations.⁶⁸ During the last months of the Bush administration, a number of Iranian editorials speculated that the revelation of links between the United States and Jundullah, in conjunction with a series of audacious and deadly bombings in southeast Iran, could not have been a coincidence: either al-Qaeda was plotting to provoke war between Tehran and Washington, or the Americans hoped that Jundullah would provide the justification for military action against Iran: 'According to an interview with Seymour Hersh, the US is training terrorist groups to cause chaos inside Iran, provoking an aggressive reaction from the Iranians, which will serve as a pretext for military action from the US.'⁶⁹ Iranian sources tend to be bitterly critical of what they consider to be Washington's hypocrisy: despite 'irrefutable' evidence of collusion between the United States and Jundullah/al-Qaeda, America has the audacity to reproach the Islamic Republic with baseless accusations of terrorism. By falsely linking the Islamic Republic to the odious Salafi terror organization, Washington's aim, as usual, is to damage Iran's international reputation in an effort to isolate the Islamic Republic. Iran, therefore, sees itself as a victim twice over: a victim of al-Qaeda terrorism – an organization with undisputable ties to the United States – and a victim of American propaganda and psychological warfare under the guise of the 'War on Terror'.⁷⁰

The Iranian Enigma

Having examined the key allegations linking Iran with al-Qaeda, and Iranian counter-recriminations of US complicity with bin Laden and his followers, we can now discuss our findings against the idiosyncrasies of the Islamic Republic and the geopolitical realities of the Middle East. It will be recalled that, on the subject of al-Qaeda, US officials have pointedly directed most of their criticism at 'hard-line' and 'unaccountable forces' within the Iranian state. Ironically, for much of the period since the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian regime was viewed by many in the West as homogenous and dominated by likeminded clerics. It was the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005) which drew attention to sharp differences amongst the clerical elite and also to parallel institutions within the regime. For Westerners, the more familiar set of institutions are the presidency, the *Majlis* (Parliament), the judiciary, and local government. With the exception of the judiciary, the rest are elected offices and conform to a system of checks and balances – at least by Iranian standards.⁷¹ The other set of institutions are non-elected and, though in principle still subject to checks and balances, are accountable in practice only to the grantees of the clerical elite. These include the office of the Supreme Leader, the *Bonyads* (Foundations), the *Basij* militia, and the security services. It is the second set of institutions that command the key apparatus of the Iranian state, exercise veto over government bills and policies, and control much of the country's wealth. They also seem to have a penchant for extrajudicial activity: through a powerful network of patronage, 'shadowy'

forces operate inside and outside Iran without the approval, or sometimes even the knowledge, of the elected government. As one Iran expert has noted, the Islamic Republic has 'a split personality': tensions between the elected institutions and autonomous elements permeate every level of the Iranian state, from politics to the economy, and from the military to foreign relations. This is why Iranian behaviour can be very confusing to the outside world with Tehran often appearing to pursue different or even contradictory objectives.⁷²

The idiosyncrasies associated with Iran's institutions are exacerbated by a sharpening factional struggle within the regime. Ever since its inception, factions have been an intrinsic part of the fabric of the Islamic Republic. However, over the past two decades, the struggle between the factions has intensified: whereas differences previously centred largely upon politics and ideology, today they are equally grounded in personal animosities, competing patronage and allegiances, as well as economic self-interest.⁷³ One result of the escalating tension has been to heighten – or at least bring to light – the activities of 'rogue' agents and 'shadowy' forces.⁷⁴ Some Western analysts believe that it is these 'unaccountable elements' which are responsible for contact – and possible collusion – with al-Qaeda.⁷⁵ Of course, much about Iran's power structure remains unknown and the inner-workings of Iran's factitious politics are by necessity speculative. Nevertheless, some of the contradictions at the heart of Iran's foreign relations are too stark to be commensurate with other 'normal' nation-states. On occasions it seems as if forces from within the Islamic Republic are determined to embarrass the government or even sabotage its foreign policy. When presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami tried to improve Iran's relations with the outside world, at crucial junctures, they found themselves frustrated by forces from within the regime that courted international controversy and condemnation. To give a few examples, during Khatami's 1998 charm offensive in the West, he attempted to draw a line under the Salmon Rushdie affair by assuring the British authorities that Khomeini's death sentence (*fatwa*) would not be carried out.⁷⁶ No sooner had he made the pledge that the president was contradicted by hard-liners in Iran whilst one of their *Bonyads*, the 15th of Khordad, increased the bounty on Rushdie's head to \$2.5 million. During the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian government offered the United States its unprecedented cooperation: including search and rescue missions and facilitating US ties with Iran's allies in the Northern Alliance. Yet all of this good work was undone by the *Karine-A* incident, a secret shipment of arms to the Palestinian Authority which may not have been sanctioned by the Khatami government.⁷⁷ The incident contributed to Iran's designation as a member-state of the 'Axis of Evil' and effectively ended Khatami's 'Dialogue of Civilisations'. When in 2003 the Iranian government contacted Washington with its 'Grand Bargain' – a secret offer to settle all outstanding issues between the two countries – the Bush administration did not take it seriously.⁷⁸ By this point, decision-makers in Washington had reached the conclusion that negotiation with the Khatami government was pointless: due to the influence wielded by 'unaccountable elements' within the regime, it would not be allowed to deliver on its promises.⁷⁹

This is all significant in the context of al-Qaeda because, in theory, it allows for the possibility of links between these same 'unaccountable elements' and bin Laden's followers. The motivation for Iran's 'shadowy' forces could be any of the aforementioned factors: eagerness to embarrass rival political factions and, in particular, the government of the day; or to sabotage efforts at improved relations with the outside world. Some hard-line elements oppose better ties with Arab countries and the West for ideological reasons and are bent upon exporting the values of the Revolution. They might be willing to consider a temporary accommodation against the 'Great Satan' and its allies with a partner which boasts Islamic credentials.⁸⁰ Then there are other elements within the regime which simply have a vested interest in the status quo: should Iran's international isolation end, their social, political and economic interests might be jeopardized.⁸¹ These groups, too, might consider working with an organization like al-Qaeda against Iran's national interests. However, aside from establishing that actions emanating from within the regime are not necessarily synonymous with the government or the entire clerical regime, we are still no closer to unravelling the mystery of Iran's alleged links with al-Qaeda: who from within the regime, and at what level of the state, would have colluded with the Sunni 'network' and to what end?

The *9/11 Commission Report* claims that contact between Iranian and al-Qaeda representatives was established in the early 1990s and involved the Hezbollah. This raises more questions than answers. Lebanon's Hezbollah has close links with the Islamic Republic: the armed wing of the militant movement was created by Iranians in the early 1980s; and Tehran publicly admits to providing Hezbollah with financial and logistical support and diplomatic cover.⁸² But, interestingly, relations between Hezbollah and the powers that be in Tehran were relatively cool in the early 1990s. As a result of factional politics, many of the Iranians who had helped organize the Hezbollah, including key intermediaries, had been removed from office by Khomeini's successors.⁸³ Amongst those ousted by President Rafsanjani in 1989 was Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour, a mid-ranking cleric and, at the time, the head of the Lebanon desk at the Iranian Foreign Ministry. The expulsion of Mohtashamipour, along with his fellow 'radical ideologues', would have done little to endear the new Khamenei-Rafsanjani powerbase to Hezbollah.⁸⁴ If there were Iranian-Hezbollah contacts with al-Qaeda in the early 1990s, it is unclear then whether these individuals were representatives of the 'radical-ideologue', who may well have been working independently of the Khamenei-Rafsanjani faction; or whether they were members of the victorious faction – the 'conservative-pragmatists' – aligned with the new Supreme Leader and President.⁸⁵ Due to lack of evidence, it is impossible to say, but we do know that the Rafsanjani administration had strained relations with Hezbollah in the early 1990s – as reflected by its difficulty in securing the immediate release of Western hostages held captive in Lebanon. Before July 2009, and the turmoil that followed Iran's contested presidential elections, one could argue that the extent of factionalism within the clerical regime has been deliberately exaggerated for the benefit of outsiders. The idea that the 'left hand' did not know what the

‘right hand’ was doing could provide Tehran with the perfect alibi or plausible deniability. However, in the aftermath of President Ahmadinejad’s controversial re-election, the scale of internal divisions amongst the ruling elite – and the role of ‘unaccountable elements’ within the Islamic Republic – has become visible for all to see.

Another important factor for consideration is ‘regime security’. The clerical rulers of Iran can be intransigent, ideological, and factitious – all of which have resulted in foreign policy decisions in the past which were contradictory or blatantly contrary to Iran’s national interests. But in one area, the Islamic Republic has shown uncanny unity, pragmatism and consistency: the preservation of the regime.⁸⁶ In numerous sermons in the 1980s, the Ayatollah Khomeini called on his supporters to preserve the ‘regime of the Islamic Republic’ at any cost.⁸⁷ A deal involving arms for hostages with the Reagan administration, behind-the-scene cooperation with Washington during the 1991 Gulf War, intermittent and covert arrangements with Israel, and cool-headed diplomacy in the immediate aftermath of September 11, demonstrate that Tehran can be both calculating and rational if it considers the fate of the regime to be in question. Islamist ideology can and is often put aside, ‘for the greater good’ of the regime, as illustrated by Iran’s expansive and warm relations with Communist North Korea and China. Critically it is the ‘unaccountable elements’ within the clerical establishment which view themselves as the true ‘guardians’ of the regime. Working through the *Bonyads*, seminaries, the security services and the Revolutionary Guard, they have in the past – and continue today – to take what measures they deem necessary to safeguard the regime.⁸⁸ Because ‘regime security’ is regarded as paramount, these forces are not constrained by ideology, sectarian boundaries or by historical enmities. They might support a Sunni movement like Hamas in Gaza, acquire arms from the US and Israel, shore up Sunni insurgents in Iraq, and supply arms and logistical support to Taliban fighters in Afghanistan – the same Wahhabis whom the Islamic Republic professes to hate; and the offshoot of the same rump Taliban government which was threatened by a mass Iranian military invasion in 1998. One must assume that limited cooperation with al-Qaeda, or its affiliates, would fall within the same remit if Iran’s ‘unaccountable elements’ felt their actions were helping to preserve the regime of the Islamic Republic.

Geopolitical exigencies – more than any other factor – would probably be the rationale for any collusion between Iran’s ‘unaccountable elements’ and al-Qaeda. But collusion need not be proactive – it could also be passive. The Iranians allegedly did little to impede the activities of al-Qaeda operatives planning attacks on Saudi Arabia from Iranian territory in 2003. Following the US-led invasion of Iraq, Tehran must have been secretly delighted with al-Qaeda’s bombing campaigns. The chaos engendered by Abu-Mus’ab Al-Zarqawi and his compatriots served the interests of the clerical regime in a number of ways. First, it tied down a sizeable portion of the American military in Iraq and dissuaded the Bush White House from any further thoughts of adventurism against Iran. Second, it showed the limitations of American power and thwarted the Neoconservatives’ plans for

a 'new order' in the region. Third, it enhanced Iran's influence and status, not just in Iraq but also throughout the rest of the Middle East. Fourth, it helped Iran's Shia allies seize power in Iraq. Fifth, it sharply dampened Iraqi – and Muslim – expectations in an American-induced settlement for the Middle East; and sixth it served to discredit Western-style democracy and secularism with at least some of the region's population. What is more, Iran rallied support amongst the Arab and Muslim masses by projecting itself as a bastion of stability and moderation against the twin forces of instability and chaos: the US-led Western world, on the one hand, and Al-Qaeda-Salafi extremism on the other. Tehran viewed the conflict between al-Qaeda and the United States as a geopolitical and ideological opportunity and as a propaganda boon. In that sense, limited cooperation with each, whilst fanning the flames, would have been a logical strategy as long as the Iranian regime did not itself become a target.

Conclusion

Two overarching themes were examined in this chapter: accusations of Iranian complicity with al-Qaeda, and the readings of al-Qaeda by Iran. It was argued that due to an acute shortage of empirical data, it is not possible – with any degree of certainty – to link Iran to al-Qaeda. One cannot rule out that at some point the clerical regime – or elements therein – may have colluded with the Sunni 'network' or its affiliates. But if there has been any collusion, it is impossible to determine at what level the Iranians may have been involved, which elements within the regime, to what extent, and to what end. The institutional structures of the clerical regime, and its fragmented political arena, make it particularly difficult for those outside Iran's ruling elite to provide an informed opinion about the nuances of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy. Indeed, it has been suggested that critics can accuse Iran of anything and find a receptive international audience for their allegations.⁸⁹ The incendiary rhetoric of the clerical leadership, the ongoing struggles between its ruling factions, its lack of transparency, its reputation for supporting terrorism, and the regime's extrajudicial activities, make it easy to believe the worst of Iran. For these reasons, Tehran's links with al-Qaeda might verge on the non-existent, or they may be more substantial or entirely different from that which we assume them to be. What is clear from this discourse is that Iran denies any complicity with al-Qaeda and provides a markedly alternative narrative about the origins, nature and purpose of the Sunni 'network'.

According to the Iranian narrative, what the Americans characterize as 'al-Qaeda' has its roots in a US-Saudi project which funded and trained Osama bin Laden and his followers in the 1980s. In the ensuing decades, the al-Qaeda movement may have become increasingly independent of its American masters and even may have been responsible for attacking US interests. However, al-Qaeda was created as an instrument of US hegemony and it continues to serve America's interests: in the 1980s, bin Laden and his fighters were proxies in the war against

the Soviet Red Army in Afghanistan whilst, today, they provide Washington with the perfect pretext to pursue its hegemonic ambitions in the Greater Middle East. Knowingly or unknowingly to al-Qaeda's leadership, the movement has become the vehicle through which the United States has finally succeeded in militarizing the Middle East. Thousands of American troops, and coalition allies, have been deployed in the region in the name of the 'war on terror', with Washington brazenly planting giant bases in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Gulf states in its efforts to fortify its hegemonic position.

Against this backdrop, Iran sees itself in the vanguard of the fight against al-Qaeda and the Wahhabi-Salafi radicalism it represents. The Iranian narrative emphasizes that the Islamic Republic in particular, and the Shia population of the Middle East in general, have been the biggest and most long-suffering targets of al-Qaeda. The hatred for Iran, and the Shia constituency, can be explained in part by a twisted ideological fervour which is at the heart of Wahhabi-Safali thinking. This ideology is as much a distortion of Islam as it is a Western imperialist construct – its origins dating back to British efforts in the previous century to sow the seeds of discord amongst the Muslim population of the Middle East. The attacks on Iran can also be explained by the fact that al-Qaeda is America's erstwhile proxy: Washington is guilty of deliberately arming and financing an al-Qaeda affiliate – the Jundullah – whilst hypocritically claiming to be waging a 'war on terror'. Although the narrative describes Iran as a victim of al-Qaeda, it also confidently foreshadows the victory of the Islamic Republic. Whereas al-Qaeda and the US can create only discord, terror and destruction in the Middle East, Iran is a 'force for good': In Lebanon, Iraq and elsewhere the Islamic Republic is countering the forces of terror by helping to pacify pockets of instability and uniting all Muslims. The path of al-Qaeda may or may not have diverged from that of its former masters. Nevertheless, the US, Saudi Arabia and al-Qaeda are united in their hostility towards Iran: all three fear Iran's growing regional influence, and all three are increasingly frustrated, and feel impotent, before the Islamic Republic's geopolitical and ideological ascendancy.

Notes

¹ Kean, Th. H. et al. 2004. *The 9/11 Commission Report: The Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

² Ibid., 61.

³ Ibid., 61 and 240.

⁴ Ibid., 240.

⁵ Ibid. 241.

⁶ Ibid., 60.

⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁸ *Sepah-e-Pasdaran-enghelab-e-Islami* or 'Corps of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolutionary' – better known in the English-speaking world as the Islamic Republic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

⁹ Hastert, P. 2007. Al Qaeda and Iran: Friends or Foes, or Somewhere in Between? *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30(4), 330–31.

¹⁰ Kean, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 61.

¹¹ Most notably in Saudi Arabia and a few of the littoral Gulf States, whose relationship with Tehran is strained, and Egypt, which does not have formal diplomatic relations with Iran. See, for example, *Al-Arabiya*, 1, September 2010. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/03/28/69379.html>.

¹² See Adam Zagorin, A. and Klein, J. 2004. 9/11 Commission Finds Ties Between Al Qaeda and Iran. *Time Magazine*, 16 July; Rotella, S. 2004. Terrorism Suspects Traced to Iran. *Los Angeles Times*, 1 August; and Joscelyn, Th. 2010. Petraeus On Iran & al Qaeda: A Dangerous Relationship. *The Weekly Standard*, 17 March 2010.

¹³ Miniter, R. 2004. *Shadow War: The Untold Story of How America Is Winning the War On Terror*. Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 15–28. Miniter claims that his information is based on personal interviews with former Iranian intelligence officers.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁷ Khalizad, Z. 2002. Speech to the American-Iranian Council in Washington DC, 13 March; also see no author. 2004. Analysts Say Washington Unlikely To Act On Reported Iran-Al-Qaeda Link' *Radio Free Europe*, 21 July; no author. 2006. [Iranian] FM Spokesman Refutes US Claims On Al-Qaeda Presence In Iran. *IRNA*, 22 March; and no author. 2008. Bush Calls Iraq Convergence Point For Al-Qaeda, Iran Threats. *Radio Free Europe*, 13 April.

¹⁸ See Brzezinski, Z., Gates, R.M., and Maloney, S. 2004. *Iran: Time For A New Approach: Report of An Independent Task Force*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 30; and Goldman, A. and Apuzzo, M. 2010. Iran's Murky Link To al Qaeda Confounds CIA. *The San Francisco Gate*, 14 May.

¹⁹ Weldon, C. 2005. *Countdown To Terror: The Top Secret Information That Could Prevent the Next Terrorist Attack On America...and How the CIA Has Ignored It*. Washington DC: Regency.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5 and 95.

²² *Ibid.*, 130; also see Hastert, 'Al Qaeda and Iran', 328.

²³ Snow, Ch.R. 2008. *The Case Against Iran*. Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 30.

²⁴ He also claims 'the earliest reported contacts' between Iran and Osama bin Laden 'occurred in 1987 through the Iranian Embassy in London', *ibid.*, 21.

²⁵ Timmerman, K.R. 2005. *Countdown To Crisis: The Coming Nuclear Showdown With Iran*. New York: Crown Forum, 310.

²⁶ For three scholarly works see Sick, G. 2003. Iran: Confronting Terrorism. *The Washington Quarterly* 26(4), 91–2; Brzezinski, Gates, and Maloney, *Iran*; and Hastert, 'Al Qaeda and Iran'.

²⁷ Sick, 'Iran', 91.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁹ Hastert, 'Al Qaeda and Iran', 334.

³⁰ Ibid., 332.

³¹ For example, one source writes of the link between Al-Qaeda and Iran in the context of a nefarious cooperation to overthrow 'religiously corrupt Islamic states' in order to replace them 'with a caliphate' – even though the very notion would be anathema to Shia Iran. See Maginnis, R. 2009. More Evidence of Iran's al-Qaeda Connections. *Human Events: Leading Conservative Media Since 1944*, 28 December. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=35000>.

³² All of this can be found, for example, in Miniters, *Shadow War*, 25–6.

³³ Brzezinski, Gates, and Maloney, *Iran*, 29.

³⁴ Sick, 'Iran', 91.

³⁵ Brzezinski, Gates, and Maloney, *Iran*, 29; Hastert, 'Al Qaeda and Iran', 332–4.

³⁶ Jehl, D. and Schmitt, E. 2003. US Suggests A Qaeda Cell in Iran Directed Saudi Bombings. *The New York Times*, 21 May.

³⁷ This was not the first instance of Iranian-US cooperation on Al-Qaeda. Hillary Leverett, a former official in the Bush administration, later confirmed that Tehran had provided Washington with a list of 220 suspects and their whereabouts in 2002 and then delivered at least two sought-after operatives to the US airbase at Bagram in Afghanistan. See Bhadrakumar, M.K. 2009. Iran Wages Lonely War of Terror. *Asia Times Online*, 4 July. [Online]. Available at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/KF04Ak01.html.

³⁸ Sayf al-Adl quoted in Husayn, F. 2006. *Al-Zarqawi: The Second Generation of Al-Qaeda*. [Online]. Available at: <http://atc2005.blogspot.com/2006/06/al-zarqawi-second-generation-of-al.html>.

³⁹ no author. 2003. Iran 'Foiled al-Qaeda Attack', *BBC News Channel*, 17 August; no author. 2003. Iran Says It Made Al Qaeda Arrests; Rank of Suspects Is Still Unknown. *The Washington Post*, 26 May; and no author. 2005. Iran Announces al-Qaeda Arrests. *BBC News Channel*, 16 July.

⁴⁰ Only a handful were extradited to Saudi Arabia.

⁴¹ Brzezinski, Gates, and Maloney, *Iran*, p. 30.

⁴² No author. 2010a. Iran Eases Grip on al Qaeda. *The Washington Times*, 13 May; no author. 2010b. Iran Eases Grip on Al-Qaeda. *Al-Asharq Al-Aawsat*, 13 May; and no author 2010c. 'Iran and Al-Qaeda Source of Growing Terror in Yemen. *Global Arab Network*, 1 January.

⁴³ Any deviation results in an official ban – a trend which has been accelerated since the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

⁴⁴ The difficulty is, once again, the acute lack of verifiable evidence – especially from the higher echelons of the Iranian state.

⁴⁵ Other noteworthy sources would include statements by the President, the Speaker of the *Majlis* (the Islamic Consultative Assembly), the Chairman of the Expediency Council, and military commanders.

⁴⁶ An Iranian news site claims to have documentary evidence linking high-ranking Saudi officials, including the Minister for Interior and Prince Bandar-bin-Sultan, with Al-Qaeda in Iraq. *Pakhsh*. 2010. 1 Khordad 1389/22 May. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.pakhsh-iran.com/site/article2284.html>.

⁴⁷ Tellingly bin Laden's death was acknowledged by *Kayhan* (3 May 2011) with the dismissive headline 'America Kills Its Own Mercenary'. Online. Available at: <http://kayhannews.ir/900213/index.htm>.

⁴⁸ These opinions were controversially repeated by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the UN General Assembly in 2010 and again in 2011. The 2010 speech was not the first time that Ahmadinejad had suggested the possibility of US government complicity in the events of 9/11. However, when he had made similar remarks in the past, his tone had been more tentative and less accusatory whilst his words would have been intended for a domestic rather than a wide international audience. See Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Speech Before the UN General Assembly (23 September 2010; and 22 September 2011). Following Ahmadinejad's 2011 UN speech, various media outlets reported that Al-Qaeda had denounced the Iranian president and called upon him to end his 9/11 'conspiracy theory'. See, for example, Dehghan, S.K. 2011. Al-Qaeda Calls On Ahmadinejad To End 9/11 Conspiracy Theories. *The Guardian*, 28 September; and no author. 2011d. Ahmadinejad 9/11 Speech Irks Al-Qaeda, *Press TV*, 29 September. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/201786.html>.

⁴⁹ Britain, alternatively described by the Iranian media as the 'little Satan' and the 'perfidious old fox', is viewed as coordinator of the global hegemonic-imperialist order led by the United States.

⁵⁰ Reported by the Afghan Voice Agency. Online. Available at <http://www.avapress.com/vdchx6nz.23n-vdft2.html>. The same sentiments were expressed, albeit in mellower tones, by Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani in an interview with a US journalist. Slavin, B. 2005. Iran's Ex-President: US Should Show Good Will. *USA Today*, 7 February.

⁵¹ Hossein Shariatmadari quoted in the Iranian documentary *The Secret Armageddon Part 2*. Online. Extracts available at: <http://khandaniha.eu/items.php?id=852>.

⁵² *The Secret Armageddon 2*.

⁵³ *Kayhan*, 15 Tir 1389/06 July 2010. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kayhannews.ir/890415/2.HTM>. *Kayhan* occasionally includes the British and Israeli security services as having a hand in the creation of Al-Qaeda.

⁵⁴ *Kayha*, 18 Farvardin 1389/07 April 2010. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kayhannews.ir/890118/5.htm>.

⁵⁵ *Payamerooz.net*, 9 Dey 1388/30 December 2009. [Online]. Available at: <http://payamerooz.net/article/996-1388-10-09-20-38-07.html>.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Similarly, the *Alef* newspaper suggests that Al-Qaeda terrorism and Taliban brutality was never anything more than a pretext for the US and its NATO allies to send their armies to the region. After all, these were the same countries which, a few years before the invasion, were insisting that the Taliban regime should be recognized and given a greater role in any power-sharing scheme. *Alef*, 31 Tir 1389/22 July 2010. [Online]. Available at: <http://alef.ir/1388/content/view/78444/>.

⁵⁷ *Panjareh Weekly*, 6 Shahrivar 1389/28 August 2010. No. 57. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.panjarehweekly.ir/main/index.php?Page=definitioncontent&UID=194137>.

⁵⁸ *Quds*, 27 Tir 1386/18 July 2007. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.qudsdaily.com/archive/1386/html/4/1386-04-27/page61.html>; and *Aftab News*, 19 Tir 1386/10 July 2007. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.aftabnews.ir/prtiqaq.t1ap52bcct.html>.

⁵⁹ *Iranian Diplomacy*, 15 August 2010. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.iraniandiplomacy.ir/index.php?Lang=fa&Page=24&TypeId=1&ArticleId=2659&Action=ArticleBodyView>; also see no author. 2008. Al Qaeda Video Slams Iran, 'Crusader' War. *Reuters*, 8 September. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL87910920080908>.

⁶⁰ Al-Zarqawi, A. 2004. Private Letter to Osama bin Laden. 12 February. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/letter-abu-musab-al-zarqawi-osama-bin-laden/p9863>.

⁶¹ *Resalat*, 23 Farvardin 1389/12 April 2010. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.resalat-news.com/fa/?code=22645>. A former Iranian official argues that Al-Qaeda is not waging a sectarian war, because its victims include Sunni civilians in Iraq. It is in fact waging war against Muslims on behalf of imperialists and Zionists. *Panjareh Weekly*, 28 August 2010.

⁶² No author 2003. Foreign Minister Confirms al-Qaeda Bombing Threats Against Iran. *payvand.com*, 22 December. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.payvand.com/news/03/dec/1165.html>; *Akharinnews.com*, 22 August 2010. [Online]. Available at: http://www.akharinnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=8743; 'Al-Qaeda Ups Anti-Iranian Rhetoric', *ynetnews.com*, 22 November 2006. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3330633,00.html>; and no author. 2010e. The Publication of New Al-Qaeda Book Against Iran. 1 September. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.shia-online.ir/article.asp?id=2809>.

⁶³ *Aftab*, 19 Tir 1386/10 July 2007. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.aftabnews.ir/prtiquaq.t1ap52bcct.html>; also see Bhadrakumar, 'Iran Wages Lonely War'.

⁶⁴ Literally 'soldiers of Allah', and officially the *People's Resistance Movement of Iran*, has been blamed for the insurgency of the Sunni Baluchi ethnic minority in southeast Iran alongside the Afghan-Pakistan border.

⁶⁵ Tehran claims to have foiled countless Al-Qaeda plots. 'Information Minister: Al-Qaeda Conspiracies Foiled in Iran', *payvand.com* (16 July 2005).

⁶⁶ *Today's Zaman*, 17 July 2010. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-216264-jundullah-bombs-kill-28-in-iran-guards-among-the-dead.html>.

⁶⁷ No author. 2009. Iran Commander Talks of US Contact With Jundullah. *Tehran Times*, 24 November. [Online]. Available at: http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=208611.

⁶⁸ Nimmo, K. 2010. Former Pakistani General: US Supports Jundullah Terrorists in Iran. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.infowars.com/former-pakistan-general-us-supports-jundullah-terrorists-in-iran>; Lowther, W. and Freeman, C. 2007. US Funds Terror Group To Sow Chaos in Iran. *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 February; no author. 2009. Ex-CIA Agent Confirms US-Jundullah Contacts. *Iran Daily*, 3 Aban 1388/25 October. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.iran-daily.com/1388/8/3/MainPaper/3529/Page/2/Index.htm>; interview with Webster Tarpley on *Russia Today*. [Online]. Available at: http://www.shiatv.net/view_video.php?viewkey=d534f207261f9217afb7; and Boundy, B. 2009. An Al Qaeda Foothold in Iran? *The Atlantic Council*. [Online]. Available at: http://www.acus.org/new_atlanticist/al-qaeda-foothold-iran.

⁶⁹ Hersh, S. 2008. US Training Jundullah and MEK For Bombing Preparations. [Online]. Available at: <http://irancoverage.com/2008/07/08/seymour-hersh-us-training-jundullah-and-mek-for-bombing-preparation/>.

⁷⁰ *Aftab News*, 11 Mordad 1389/2 August 2010. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.risheh.com/view-4464.html>. It should be noted that in November 2010 the US State Department announced the listing of Jundullah as a terrorist organization. This decision was welcomed by the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast, as a 'measure in the right direction'. See *Islamic Republic News Agency*, 4 November 2010.

⁷¹ Iran might have regular elections, but they are not necessarily free and fair.

⁷² Sick, 'Iran', 83. Also see Klebnikov, P. 2003. Millionaire Mullahs, *Forbes*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2003/0721/056.html>; Taheri, A. 2004. Who Rules Iran, *The Jerusalem Post*. [Online] Available at: http://www.iran-press-service.com/articles_2004/Mar_04/who_rules_iran_29304.htm; and Porteous, T. 2006. Reading Iran', *Prospect*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2006/01/readingiran/>.

⁷³ During the 2009 presidential campaign, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad launched a series of personal attacks, not just against rival candidates, but also their wives and patrons.

⁷⁴ The most notorious public instance being the 'serial' assassination of Iranian dissidents in 1998 at the behest of a Deputy Director of the Ministry of Intelligence.

⁷⁵ See, for example, no author. 2004. Iran As A Regional Power. *Parliamentary Selection Committee On Foreign Affairs* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmcaff/80/8006.htm>; Farmer, B. 2009. Iranian Weapons Getting Through To Taliban'. *The Daily Telegraph*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/5477283/Iranian-weapons-getting-through-to-Taliban.html>; and Alan M. Dershowitz, A.M. 2010. Obama's Legacy and the Iranian Bomb. *The Wall Street Journal*. [Online]. Available at: http://www.law.harvard.edu/news/2010/03/23_dershowitz.html.

⁷⁶ MacLeod, S. 1998. Iran: Why the Rushdie Fatwa Was Lifted Now, *Time*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,989262,00.html>.

⁷⁷ Sanger, D.E. 2002. A Nation Challenged: The Rogue List; Bush Aides Say Tough Tone Put Foes on Notice. *New York Times*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/31/world/a-nation-challenged-the-rogue-list-bush-aides-say-tough-tone-put-foes-on-notice.html?ref=davidesanger>.

⁷⁸ See interview with US State Department officials in the documentary *Iran and the West*, broadcast by the BBC in 2008. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1936>; and Murray, D. 2009. *US Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relations Since the Islamic Revolution*. London: Routledge, 126–7.

⁷⁹ When he was a European Commissioner, Chris Patten once allegedly remarked that Iranian ministers came across as no more than 'messenger boys'. Taheri, 'Who Rules Iran'.

⁸⁰ Following Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, there was apparently a small but vociferous minority within the Iranian regime who wished to join forces with the Iraqi dictator against the American-led multinational force.

⁸¹ Small 'empires' have been built in Iran on the back of international sanctions and the black market in contraband.

⁸² Norton, A.R. 2007. *Hezbollah: A Short History*. Oxford: Princeton University Press; also see Wright, R. 1988. A Reporter At Large, Teheran Summer. *The New Yorker*, 5 September, 37–72.

⁸³ One such figure, Mehdi Hashemi, was executed during the lifetime of the Grand Ayatollah for exposing the Iran-Contra Scandal, in what turned out to be the precursor to the purges that followed Khomeini's death in 1989.

⁸⁴ Norton, *Hezbollah*, 44–5; Ranstorp, M. 1996. *Hizbollah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 102–5.

⁸⁵ For further reading on 'radical ideologues' and 'conservative pragmatists' see the seminal article by Ramazani, R.K. 1989. Iran's Foreign Policy: Contending Orientations. *Middle East Journal* 43(2), 202–17.

⁸⁶ 'Hefz-e-nezam-jomhour-e-Islami'.

⁸⁷ See his speech. [Online]. Available at: <http://il.youtube.com/watch?v=Ux8qDyXWWUY&feature=related>; and extracts from his will: [Online]. Available at: (<http://www.hawzah.net/Hawzah/Books/BookView.aspx?BookID=45245&LanguageID=1&BookArticleID=19545>).

⁸⁸ Over the past decade, and especially following the contested 2009 presidential elections, some of these forces have revealed their hand – most notably the Revolutionary Guard, which have been accused of seizing the levers of power within the Iranian state in what amounts to a silent coup.

⁸⁹ Sick, 'Iran', 84–8.

Chapter 8

Terrorizing Women: Re-thinking the Female Jihad

Nadya Ali

On 28 September 2005, the first al-Qaeda female suicide bomber blew herself up in Iraq, killing six people and injuring up to 30. Her name remains unknown. The incident subsequently passed with little notice, an aberration, in the otherwise male dominated world of global jihad. However since the first attack women including Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi, Malika el Aroud, Colleen LaRose, and Muriel Degauque have joined an ever-growing list of al-Qaeda affiliated female fighters. They hail from the Middle East, the United States and from Europe, are of varying age backgrounds but they have all taken their place alongside their male counterparts as agents of military jihad. This new development has caused a profound sense of shock amongst western¹ audiences. After all the 'War on Terror'² has been marketed as an emancipatory project, conjuring up images of the classic Oriental Muslim woman, silent and powerless, in need of liberation. The female jihadi³ shatters this edifice of passivity through her acts of violence and in doing so turns against her would be liberators. This phenomenon requires urgent and critical reflection especially in light of the inadequate explanations currently provided by terrorism experts, strategists and the intelligence community. These accounts attempt to explain the rise of women fighters but are dominated by static understandings of culture and gender, which are not useful beyond highlighting the need for deeper reflection.

This chapter will look at the varying explanations for this trend with particular reference to two case studies, that of Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi and Malika el Aroud. Why do these women, who are deemed to be potential 'winners' of the War on Terror violently reject this effort? James Der Derian argues that 'any productive reading of terrorism requires a difficult, even contorted feat, of stepping outside of the one-dimensional identities that terrorism and national security culture has implanted on both sides.'⁴ By avoiding traditional methodological approaches found in terrorism studies a much fuller understanding can be gained not just of the female jihadis, but of our own contributions to their construction. The identities of terrorists should not be taken as ontologically prior to our understanding of them but as flowing from our own assumptions. Through critical discourse analysis of the relevant sources we can deconstruct the most prominent narratives of female fighters and see how they are understood.

The first part of the chapter is a genealogical study of contemporary Muslim women who exist in the western consciousness. In drawing upon the work of Edward Said and his concept of 'Orientalism' we see how the oppressed figure of veil clad Muslim women has historically arisen from within the western imagination. This genealogical account will provide the contextual framework to understand the discursive formation of Muslim women prior to 9/11. Then the figure of the female jihadi is introduced; she presents a troubling development to prevailing discourses through her violence. How will western commentators try to explain her actions? Will Orientalist assumptions continue to form the basis of our knowledge of Muslim women after appearance of the female jihadi, or will this development force a re-think of our cultural understandings?

Finally the limitations of the accounts of female jihadis will be expanded upon. By comparing Arab women with white western ones the differences and similarities in the respective explanations for them should become clear. In addition, taking a closer look at the ways in which gender, as an identity marker, will also help to produce assumptions about the behaviour of women jihadis. Referring in particularly to the work of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault we will argue that understandings of the female give rise to a very context specific reading of female jihadis. Consequently we are no better acquainted with white western jihadis, products of *our culture* than with Arab ones. They are equally 'unknowable' insofar as they are being a part of the west provides no reasons as to why they commit acts of political violence; indeed it works against us understanding them as anything but an aberration.

Method Matters

Traditional terrorism studies have been limited by taking for granted the identity of perpetrators and by being preoccupied with technical and descriptive accounts of events. To simply condemn female jihadis or explain their behaviour via traditional approaches which concentrate on organizational issues or aim for general theories of political violence is insufficient. Although organizational aspects of terrorists groups are important to understand, rather tellingly, they are also the most quantifiable. In other words these 'concrete' details lend themselves to academic study like studying the organizational structure of the IRA or counting the numbers of suicide bombings perpetrated by the LTTE. In the same way the identity of terrorists is also taken to be a 'fact' which helps explain their actions. This point is central to our understanding of female jihadis; it demonstrates how methodology matters because it fundamentally shapes our approach and the answers which we arrive at. If women are thought to become terrorists because of gender related concerns then we get a very particular reading of the female jihad. The notion that identity may be a social process rather than essence is overlooked and arguably this lack of critical engagement by terrorism experts has been encouraged by the dominant methodology.

Any study of female jihadis must avoid these pitfalls if we are to gain a more productive reading of the situation. Drawing on Foucault, the emphasis will be on how knowledge about terrorists is constructed rather than assuming that the answers are 'out there', independent of us, and waiting to be discovered. A Foucauldian approach enables us to comprehend the ways in which this subject is conceived and how this then leads to certain interventionist practises. Foucault asserted that all knowledge is a product of power.⁵ Whereas traditionally feminists and political theorists more generally have regarded power as just repressive, we take the view that it is *also* productive. Power helps to produce knowledge through categorization and differentiation that in turn constitutes subjects and objects.⁶

Facts cannot be independently ascertained from the shackles of power but are instead the outcome of power operations. Thus the significance of categories like 'gender', 'culture' and 'religion' is that they are constitutive of subjects. The female jihadi does not stand out as a self-evident aberration but is deemed to be such within the context of our understanding of Muslim women. Why should this be the case?

Before and after September 11: Writing Muslim Women

The focus of the United States' War on Terror has been the male jihadi, epitomized by the hijackers of 9/11. President George Bush thus spoke 'Evil men, obsessed with ambition and unburdened by conscience, must be taken very seriously ... And we must stop them before their crimes can multiply.'⁷ 'Evil women' never feature in the War on Terror discourse. However, Muslim women have played a crucial part in the helping to legitimize the actions of the Bush administration. The justifications for the invasion of Afghanistan were intrinsically linked to a wider narrative of good versus evil. Richard Jackson notes '...the language of good and evil is also clearly a part of the representational project in which not only must the boundaries between 'them' and 'us' be clearly delineated but the nature and qualities of ourselves and the other enemy must be affirmed.'⁸ The construction of 'evil' male terrorists excludes the idea that women may be part of this group. The only time they feature in the discourse is in terms of how they are oppressed by the common enemy. USA Today echoes the prevailing sentiment:

[T]he Global War on Terror is a fight over the social, economic and cultural roles of women. The core issues for the terrorists are the interpretation of God's will and the continued oppression of women. Nothing so threatens Islamic extremists as the freedom Western women enjoy.⁹

The fate of the women of Afghanistan and of the wider Muslim world is interwoven with that of the allies. It is suggested that in ridding the world of terror the US would also be freeing Muslim women from the common threat of the Muslim man. Consequently the enemy in the War on Terror has overwhelmingly been

male and the female served as a counterpoint of victim and ally. However the re-writing of Muslim women as oppressed allies is based upon an array of existing assumptions on categories such as gender and culture. In taking the Foucauldian perspective we can see that the categorizations which produce subjects such as the 'Muslim woman' should be viewed as time and context specific.

Before September 11

Constructions of Muslim women have occurred through the lens of historic political, economic and social domination by the west of colonized peoples. When the European eye turned outward in a quest for global domination, there was the problem of understanding cultures so different from their own. 'Europeans had the confident knowledge of being at the apex of civilization, but this conviction could be destabilized upon their arrival in the Middle East.'¹⁰ In other words they had a problem of knowledge: how could the 'other' be dominated if they could not be understood? After all Bryan Turner argues that 'To know is to subordinate.'¹¹ Edward Said was the first to describe this framework of understanding that governed the iniquitous power relationship between Europe and the colonized as 'Orientalism'.¹² Revealingly, the study of Orientalism was 'the nineteenth century science of culture ... through the study of key texts to be able to capture the essence of particular civilizations whilst revalorizing and systemizing their pasts and imagining a world of ethnic nations.'¹³ The notion that the essence of cultures could be ascertained by reading their 'key texts' was reflective of a broader attitude at that time. 'Facts' about peoples were thought to be the same as 'facts' about the natural world, something measurable, needing only to be discovered. There has been considerable work since the publication of Said's seminal publication on the layers which make up the discourse. As Turner notes: 'Orientalism is a discourse which represents the exotic, erotic, strange Orient as a comprehensible, intelligible phenomenon within a network of categories, tables and concepts by which the Orient is simultaneously defined and controlled.'¹⁴ The juxtaposition of the other as inferior to the self was an insidious understanding which served to dominate and discipline colonies. From this emerged the object of study, the 'Orient', popularized in literature and art, in what is described as 'colonial forms of knowledge'.¹⁵

The women of the Orient are described as 'doubly colonized',¹⁶ they are not just victims of racial prejudice but also sexism. Said explains 'Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke for herself and she never represented her own emotions. He spoke for her and thus represented her.'¹⁷ Colonial knowledge silences Muslim women and constitutes them the objects of sexual desire. Jasmin Zine expands on this point. 'Veiled Muslim women were constructed in the Western literary imagination as objects of desire, sensual, elusive harem girls and yet were disavowed in the same breath as backwards victims of their heathen and misogynistic cultures.'¹⁸ Hence the very 'essence' of Muslim women is constituted

via their status as inferior ‘others’ that are concomitantly objects of fascination and desire. Whilst the Oriental discourse has provided a tantalizing subject there is a flaw at the heart of this understanding. Zine also argues, ‘The colonial era also produced more openly sexualized images of Muslim women as harem concubine, as well as the victimized, *veiled, and secluded image* of the oppressed “Muslim Woman”.’¹⁹ Thus the significance of the veil comes into sharp relief: the idea of the physical and metaphorical concealment of the Muslim women challenges western understandings. In ‘inhibiting the imperialist masculinist gaze’²⁰ through veiling Muslim women escape a deeper subjection.

Foucault argued that the development of modernity, in Western Europe, worked hand in hand with the creation of the docile body. Techniques of discipline and subjection were practised in institutions like prisons and hospitals.²¹ The human body was deemed to be the locus of social power, and to utilize but also to restrict it, it must be subjected to control.²² In doing so the body of the political community could in effect regulate itself through differentiation of subjects and the normalization of their identities. However this process can only occur through constant surveillance and veiling subverts this process. Muslim women escape the discipline which ‘compares, differentiates, heirarchizizes, homogenizes, excludes.’²³ Whereas categories of sexuality were successfully created and normalized to the extent that heterosexuality identity was considered as normal and behaviours deviating from this as ‘abnormal’, there is no equivalent for women of the Orient. The fact that they are concealed merely communicates to the occidental mind that they are unknowable insofar as they evade the eye of the panopticon. This then is the paradox of Orientalism: at once claiming to provide knowledge of the ‘other’ but failing because of the limitations of its own gaze.

After September 11

Following the events of 9/11, Islam, and Arab culture came under intense scrutiny and criticism in the west. Politicians, political commentators and the public were all deciding to what extent the audacious act of flying planes into buildings was the result of cultures and religions different from ‘our’ own. By extension, questions about the status of Muslim women within Islamic countries were revived; particularly ones the United States decided to invade like Afghanistan. Consequently Afghani women assumed a central position in discourse on the War on Terror. Krista Hunt comments:

Since September 11, 2001, there have been a number of war stories about women’s liberation emanating from the White House...Many feminists including myself, were very sceptical of the Bush administration’s (en)gendering of the war on terror and saw this as an opportunistic way to moralize and justify war.²⁴

Co-opting Muslim women onto the side of the 'good' and 'civilized' world was easily done. Bush, his cohorts, and the media were simply tapping into a rich discursive economy which allowed for the construction of Muslim female victimhood. Lila Abu-Lughod sums up the power of such narratives:

However I do not think that it would be as easy to mobilise so many of these American and European women if it were not a case of Muslim men oppressing Muslim women – women of cover of whom they can feel sorry and in relative to whom they can feel smugly superior.²⁵

The foundation of this discourse was already present and therefore the idea of the oppressed Muslim woman resonates strongly. The discourse simply needed some reconfiguration to fit into the *modus operandi* of the War on Terror.

Laura Bush cut a compassionate figure in the War on Terror, alongside her more bellicose husband. Instrumentalizing the First Lady to speak on behalf of the oppressed women of Afghanistan was a masterstroke insofar as her gentle manner and soft voice offered a humanizing face to the increasing militarization of American foreign policy. She helped legitimize the war by giving various speeches and talking to the media:

Only the terrorists and the Taliban threaten to pull out women's fingernails for wearing nail polish. The plight of women and children in Afghanistan is a matter of deliberate human cruelty, carried out by those who seek to intimidate and control...Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment.²⁶

This is an example of what Hunt described as 'embedded feminism', 'the incorporation of feminist discourse and feminist activists into political projects that claim to serve the interests of women.'²⁷ Embedding the ordinary Afghani woman into the War on Terror discourse played well with a western audience. These women were presented as a homogenous entity 'primarily as victims of the Taliban. The most striking recurring image is of these women in the veil.'²⁸ These images resonate with us because of the familiar cultural framework in which they operate. When Foucault spoke about 'regimes of truth', he was referring to discourses which are the unspoken rules and regulations about the way in which our knowledge is organized. The 'truth' of the situation does not stem from the self-evident brutality of an event (like the treatment of women under the Taliban) but from the way in which it is conceived. The idea that one of the worst aspects of Taliban rule was forced veiling or the inability to listen to music or to use nail polish conceals a myriad of other pressing problems that faced and continue to face, Afghani women. Afghanistan was one of the battlegrounds in which Cold War enacted itself. War was perpetrated by outside powers including the former USSR and US who, at the end of this particular incursion left behind weapons,

trained fighters and a devastated nation. The Taliban were initially welcomed for the order and security they brought in the aftermath of internecine conflict. Yet this important context has largely been stripped out of the War on Terror rhetoric. Indeed within the context of American suffering and al-Qaeda's barbarity, it would have seemed 'apologetic' to bring up such inconvenient truths. Furthermore the impact of these lengthy military campaigns and the general decline of the Afghani state have posed significant challenges to women. Abu Lughod writes 'there was a blurring of the very separate causes in Afghanistan of women's continuing malnutrition, poverty, and ill health and their recent exclusion under the Taliban from employment, schooling, and the joys of wearing nail polish'.²⁹ The fact the military campaign worsened many aspects of the everyday lives of Afghan women was hardly entertained. Ratna Kapur points to the crisis in refugee camps on the Pakistani border, full mainly of Afghani women and children, and how the invasion in 2003 exacerbated this situation.³⁰

In addition to the condition of women in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the on-going military campaign, very little attention has been paid to the decline of women's rights in Iraq. Whilst the liberation of Muslim women was not a central theme in the discourse around the war in Iraq, the fact that there has been a serious deterioration of the position of women has hardly been addressed. The rise of sectarian politics in Iraq has resulted in the corresponding repression of women. Instead of liberating Iraq from tyranny, the invasion has triggered a new atmosphere of brutal oppression for women. Peter Beaumont discusses the widespread use of rape, violence and intimidation against women by Shia and Sunni militants: 'It is a violence that would not be possible without a wider, permissive brutalizing of women's lives: one that permeates the 'new Iraq' in its entirety'.³¹ Key legislation such as the Family Code which had helped to codify a 'large measure of equality' for women in areas of divorce and inheritance has been supplanted by the power of the clerical establishment.³² Women are also discouraged from entering into certain professions and there have been a number of cases where visibly working women have been shot down by militant gangs.³³

The controversy surrounding the mistreatment of male inmates at Abu Ghraib did not take into account that Iraqi women were also being systematically abused. Luke Harding notes:

Late last year, Swadi, one of seven female lawyers now representing women detainees in Abu Ghraib, began to piece together a picture of systemic abuse and torture perpetrated by US guards against Iraqi women held in detention without charge. This was not only true of Abu Ghraib, she discovered, but was, as she put it, 'happening all across Iraq'.³⁴

The Christian Science Monitor also picks up on these abuses:

Amongst the 1800 or so pictures taken by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib, there are others viewed by Congress but not released to the public, of at least

one Iraqi woman forced to bare her breasts. And a US military investigator, Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba, cited at least one case of a military police guard 'having sex with' a female prisoner.³⁵

The Iraq case shows that the War on Terror discourse has excluded discussions of how American interventions have created real and immediate difficulties for Muslim women. The notion that the benevolent interveners have in fact been responsible for many abuses of Muslim women runs counter to the accepted narrative. This also helps explain why the condition of women in Afghanistan received so much attention and why Iraqi women in the aftermath of the war received next to none in the mainstream media. Therefore the discourse about Muslim women after 9/11, was deeply reliant on the Oriental framework, and was specifically related to their role as victims of Muslim men. Instances in which the coalition troops were responsible for the abuse of Muslim women received little media attention and did not seem to resonate with western audiences. Instead the explicit link between the War on Terror as a counter-terror measure and as a liberatory force for women dictated the terms of our understanding and of media coverage. Thus Muslim women had effectively been co-opted into the war effort. The discursive practices which have led to the construction of Muslim women as victims of male Muslim barbarity who require saving has very deep historical roots. Muslim women are an ally in the War on Terror and simultaneously a part of the inferior 'Oriental' culture. The War on Terror has created suffering and difficulties for Muslim women, however far too often this reality goes unrecognized. Thus the image of the wars of liberation present in the western consciousness, and the brutal events such as the abuse in Abu Ghraib which contradict them, and from which we are shielded, create a chasm of understanding between 'us' and 'them'.

The Rise of al-Qaeda's Women

Muslim women are increasingly participating in military campaigns against western forces particularly in Iraq. There have been a number of attempted and actual suicide attacks by women which have garnered significant attention from western audiences. But there has also been a greater, more vocal, online presence where women have sought to radicalize other Muslims.³⁶ Much has been made of greater female participation as it seems to run counter to what influential figures in al-Qaeda such as Ayman Al-Zawahiri deem appropriate which is to provide a supporting role for men who fight.³⁷ Nonetheless there is an upward trend in the participation of Muslim women against coalition troops. This change poses a number of difficulties to the western discourse on Muslim women and their prescribed role within the War on Terror.

The rise of al-Qaeda affiliated female jihadis emerges from the backdrop of greater ideological permissiveness. Whilst Osama bin Laden,³⁸ and Ayman al Zawahiri, have previously rejected the notion of women's jihad being anything

other than a support role for men, this is now beginning to change. There has been an increasing clamour from female jihadis to take part in 'military' jihad. This debate appears to be taking place largely over the internet on forums and Islamist websites such as 'al Sahab' and 'al-Khansaa'.³⁹ A pertinent example includes 'Letter to my Muslim Sisters', written by Umayma al-Zawahiri, wife of Ayman al-Zawahiri. It deals with the role of Muslim women in the jihad.⁴⁰ Nelly Lahoud provides a cogent account of the letter which is representative of a wider debate that asks the question, 'to what extent is military jihad for women justified'? Lahoud articulates this perspective: 'Does Umayma al-Zawahiri support military jihad? Her views on this question are open to interpretation.'⁴¹ What this debate signifies is a greater engagement by Islamists in articulating the nature of the female jihad. The opening up of dialogue is reflective of an increasing pressure from would be participants. However, traditionally women have always been encouraged to play the role of the enabler. Katherine von Knop outlines that 'they function as operational facilitators, supporting the male relatives, and as ideological educators of their children and this should not be underrated.'⁴² But the easing of doctrinal strictures regarding the role of the female jihadi has enabled many women to take part in military activity. Here we examine two such cases.

Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi

Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi was involved in a series of attacks launched on western hotels in the Jordanian capital, Amman, in 2005. Alongside her husband Ali Hussein Ali al-Shamari, she targeted the Radisson SAS hotel whilst the other two bombers attacked the Grand Hyatt hotel and the Days Inn. According to the Heritage Foundation, 57 people died as result of the bombings, the responsibility of which was taken by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and 'al-Qaeda in Iraq'.⁴³ The three male bombers successfully detonated their suicide vests but al-Rishawi failed to detonate hers and was ushered out of the wedding party that her husband subsequently blew up. She was also said to be the sister of al-Zarqawi's 'right hand man', Thamer Atrissi al-Rishawi as well as the sister in law of his 'chief bomb maker' Nidal Arabiyat.⁴⁴

Al-Rishawi drew significant attention from this suicide bombing in comparison to her male counterparts. This was compounded by the fact she was also caught and gave a public confession on Jordanian television. The explanations for female involvement (as opposed to al-Rishawi's individual motives) start with strategic considerations. The ability of women to conceal explosives under their robes and the idea they raise less suspicion has helps to shape our understanding of their involvement. The Christian Science Monitor comments: 'Though female suicide bombers are not unheard of, they are very rare, and Rishawi's presence in the car probably eased their passage across the frontier, since she didn't fit the usual insurgent profile.'⁴⁵ This argument was echoed by Robert Pape during an exchange with Mia Bloom, Ray Suarez and Mohammed Hafez on PBS, 'There

is no question that using women for suicide terrorist attacks provides a tactical advantage because of the fact that most people are not expecting them to do it.⁷⁴⁶ Although there is merit in what Pape argues this narrative merely reduces female jihadis to their strategic usefulness. This narrative overlooks the idea that their actions could have a different significance or be understood as something other than a utility. Indeed this particular construction of the female suicide bomber as 'Jihad's Cheapest Weapon'⁷⁴⁷ nullifies the agency of Muslim women and eliminates the political dimension of their involvement. This is ironic because one of the chief complaints of western commentators is that Muslim women are politically and socially marginalized within Arab countries.

Presumably al-Rishawi was not solely motivated to commit suicide terrorism because it has developed into an expedient *modus operandi* for militants to use women. The strategic narrative ignores the tortured intellectual debate taking place on jihadist websites about the appropriate role of female jihadis. It would seem that the ideological changes that have permitted their involvement are glossed over. It is very likely that al-Rishawi had an array of motives. Importantly this discussion also illustrates that strategic explanations, counter-intuitively, rely on the gender of the jihadi to help resolve the contradictions created by her actions. In other words the disruption that al-Rishawi poses via her gendered identity is immediately neutralized by reifying her femininity as a strategically useful asset. We are comforted by the notion that *of course* al-Qaeda will use women. Furthermore this particular narrative does not, in any way, refer to Orientalist assumptions about Muslim women. This suggests that in trying to understand the rise of female jihadi, explanations rely on cross cultural, gender based claims.

The subject in the strategic narrative is merely a passive utility. This sense of powerlessness is further reinforced by other accounts of al-Rishawi's behaviour. An article entitled, 'Suicide Bomber: My Husband taught me', argues that her husband was largely responsible for orchestrating her actions.⁷⁴⁸ Furthermore it was claimed that al-Rishawi 'had married her fellow bomber less than a week before she went on her suicide mission. The man was less a groom than a chaperone: according to Jordanian Government sources, the marriage was never consummated.'⁷⁴⁹ The suggestion in these articles is that al-Rishawi was a victim of her husband. The use of the word 'chaperone' would imply that she could not be trusted to go by herself or that her husband was in some way leading her into the mission. This sense of manipulation is further enhanced by al-Rishawi's confession on Jordanian TV where she claimed 'My husband is the one who organized everything. I know nothing else.'⁷⁵⁰ This popularity of this particular narrative tells us is that it appears easier for many to accept that her behaviour was caused through coercion. Indeed there have also been claims that al-Qaeda has been 'grooming rape victims to become female suicide bombers.'⁷⁵¹ This has been a recurring theme in explaining the rise in female suicide bombers. The argument relating to duress displaces responsibility onto the individuals who are manipulating vulnerable women. This idea is given further credence by suggestions that she was brainwashed, a popular explanation for the actions of suicide bombers. For instance her interrogators

commented 'Her education is limited ... She has been brainwashed and believes her mission is in life is to wage a war against all infidels.'⁵² Hence female jihadis only seem to emerge from the context of abuse and manipulation of men.

Another notable feature within the discourse regarding al-Rishawi was the idea that she was motivated by revenge. This is a common explanation for women who participate in political violence and has been levelled against the so-called 'black widows' of Chechnya.⁵³ The Times noted 'The Iraqi woman who accompanied her husband on a suicide bombing in Jordan last week was apparently seeking to avenge three close relatives who were killed by American forces in Iraq over the past year.'⁵⁴ Mia Bloom adds weight to this idea by arguing that revenge motives are common amongst female jihadis: 'According to their suicide videos and interviews with those who knew them, the women are most often driven by the desire to avenge the deaths of relatives, to redeem the family name, to escape a sheltered life or to equalize patriarchal societies.'⁵⁵ Such an interpretation, however, introduces a number of contradictions within the discourse. It runs counter to the notion that al-Rishawi was 'brainwashed' or utilized because it suggests some degree of agency. However what revenge motives denote are deeper, 'gender' oriented forms of behaviour. In other words, women are thought to be motivated by their emotions like grief or anger and not by political reasons. Female jihadis may lose family members but this seems like a partial explanation. After all don't male jihadis also lose members of their family? Zawahiri is quoted as saying '(I have) tasted the bitterness of American brutality: my favourite wife's chest was crushed by a concrete ceiling.'⁵⁶ Yet his motivations aren't attributed to revenge but to his religious and political beliefs.

The coverage of al-Rishawi is interesting for another reason. The Orientalist discourse appears to be almost entirely absent. Even the suggestions of manipulation by her husband do no make any reference to cultural imperatives for such behaviour. Instead we see the attempt to explain al-Rishawi's violence through the linked though contradictory ideas of passivity, manipulation and revenge. This figure is distinctly a-political: either forced by others into action or driven to violence in a bid to avenge dead relatives. Why is this? Primarily the desire to strip female jihadis of any political significance is a way of avoiding the challenge they present. The War on Terror is presented as a way of liberating Muslim women, from the common enemy of the Muslim man; recognizing the contradiction that female jihadis pose will undermine the whole basis of this particular discourse. Therefore to characterize them as non-political and driven by emotions is a much more convenient method of side stepping the need to understand why they would oppose western forces. What these narratives illustrate is that the Orientalist framework does not assert itself; the inherent weaknesses of historic Oriental claims are entirely swept away with the arrival of al-Rishawi and her cohorts. Instead we see increasing reliance on gender-oriented motives to explain away their behaviour and provide meaning for their motives. This explains the stress which these narratives place on these women's vulnerability and emotional responses.

Malika el Aroud

Malika el Aroud is the widow of Abdessattar Dahamane, the man who Osama bin Laden charged with the responsibility to kill Afghani leader, Ahmed Shah Massoud, prior to the invasion in 2003.⁵⁷ She returned from Afghanistan to Belgium, her country of residence, and was tried along with 21 other people for the murder of Massoud. All charges were dropped against her for lack of evidence.⁵⁸ She met and married her second husband, Moez Garsallaoui. In 2005 both were arrested and charged with supporting 'al-Qaeda linked groups' through their online activities.⁵⁹ They were convicted in 2007 of 'terrorism offences'.⁶⁰ Subsequently the couple set up the 'Minbar-SoS' website where El-Aroud wrote under the pseudonym 'Umm Obeyda', urging jihad against the infidels. She attracted the attention of intelligence services and significant support amongst online activists.⁶¹ She was re-arrested in December 2007, with 13 other people, 'in a suspected plot to free a convicted terrorist from prison and to mount an attack in Brussels' but no charges were brought.⁶² She was arrested once more in December 2008, 'as part of an operation to thwart a terror attack being planned to coincide with an EU summit in Brussels'.⁶³ Subsequently El Aroud was convicted and sentenced for eight years for, 'setting up, financing, and leading a terrorist group aiding al-Qaeda' and is currently serving her sentence.⁶⁴

The narratives of Malika el Aroud are striking for a number of reasons. She has written prolifically in her role as an online female jihadi and has also voluntarily given interviews to journalists. She has been forthcoming about her life and the events which led to her radicalization. Her interview with journalist Peter Cruickshank in 2006 appears to form the basis of western impressions of her.⁶⁵ Notably much of what is said about her is comes from intelligence services who have been tracking her activities since 2001.⁶⁶ Claude Moniquet, President of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre typically remarks: 'Malika is a role model, an icon who is bold enough to use her own name. She plays an important strategic role as a source of inspiration. She's very clever – and extremely dangerous'.⁶⁷ She has also written a biography and political tract called 'Soldiers of Light'⁶⁸ which outlines her experiences and ideology. Thus it would seem that el Aroud contributes to her own discursive constructions. This is something which comes out very clearly in the press coverage and in the statements of intelligence officers.

She has stated 'It is not my role to set off bombs – that's ridiculous. I have a weapon. It's to write. It's to speak out. That's my jihad'.⁶⁹ She is the antithesis of Flaubert's Kuchuk Hanem: vocal, active and independent. We can be in no doubt about her beliefs or motivations for her actions because she tells us what she thinks and what she hopes to achieve. If the Orientalist framework appeared to be ignored in the case of al-Rishawi, in the face of Malika el Aroud it breaks down completely. There is nothing within Oriental notions of Muslim women which can educate us about el Aroud: she does this herself. However, because she is able to make herself heard, and in such convincing fashion, she stands out

as a female fighter. Her status as an online jihadi is seemingly unparalleled: the overwhelming impression we receive about her is that she is different to other jihadis and is described in terms befitting female icons rather than terrorists. Glenn Audenaert remarks 'Wherever she goes, she touches people.'⁷⁰ Moreover one of her 'followers' is quoted as saying: 'Sister Oum Obeyda is virtuous amongst the virtuous; her life is dedicated to the good on this earth'.⁷¹ The fact that she has been called a, 'legend', a 'magnet' and an 'icon' would suggest that her importance has been recognized and accepted by European intelligence services.⁷² However the sense of exceptionalism which underpins constructions of her character can be read as an attempt to set her apart: other female jihadis would not behave like this because they are not like her. She is atypical, a novelty and presumably an army of Malika el Aroud's would be less readily explainable.

However there is another narrative which is deployed to explain her behaviour, her relationship with her first husband, Abdessattar Dahamane. Their marriage is taken to be the start of her radicalization, even though she was already in attendance at the 'Centre Islamique Belge'. The centre is described as 'adhering to a rigid, fundamentalist interpretation of Islam'.⁷³ In fact she had already moved from wearing 'western clothes' to full veiling before she met her husband. Nonetheless Cruickshank goes on to explain:

Malika met Abdessattar at a tram stop in Brussels. She was fully veiled; he bore the deep marks of prostration before Allah... They grew passionate – about each other, and about jihad. Two years later, Abdessattar would become a martyr. This past December, Malika would be arrested in a vast counterterrorism operation in Belgium, with authorities calling her 'an al-Qaeda legend'. Utter devotion led them there.⁷⁴

The by-line reads 'She was a single mom; he was divorced and searching. Together they kindled an epic passion for each other – and jihad'.⁷⁵ A CNN documentary also describes it as a 'story of love'.⁷⁶ This effusive, overtly romantic language echoes the sentiments of el Aroud which are found in 'Soldiers of Light', 'You have, O God, honoured me immensely in my marrying this man who has given me 30 years of love in one year!'⁷⁷ Again the intertextuality between el Aroud and western journalists is apparent. The details she has relayed about her relationship with her husband shape the impressions we have of her. The Oriental discourse is, again, notable only by its absence and the el Aroud case demonstrates that this framework of understanding is quickly dispensed with in the same instant in which western understanding collide with female jihadis.

Journalists make much of her rebellious youth, and her strict father claiming: 'Malika had grown up feeling stifled and frustrated; her observant parents had required her to don a veil at home, yet she wore miniskirts and tight jeans to school'.⁷⁸ She is presented as a victim of repression who is torn between two cultures, a typical Muslim girl, at the mercy of her tyrannical father. In fact this is the only instance in which the Oriental discourse arguably plays out in narratives

regarding female jihadis but it is quickly marginalized in the wider context of the 'immigrant as outsiders' story. In an interview with CNN el Aroud states rather forcefully 'You are a foreigner in Belgium. You are a foreigner in Morocco. A dirty foreigner wherever you go. So it wasn't exactly a gift our parents gave us'.⁷⁹ It also transpires that she was expelled from school 'for striking a teacher who el Aroud said uttered a racial taunt'.⁸⁰ Whilst her dissatisfaction at her father is given plenty of attention the anger she feels towards Belgian society for what she perceives to be racism is overlooked. Her sense of social dislocation is also reflected in her time spent clubbing and drinking which provoked deep self-disgust and culminated in a suicide attempt.⁸¹ She says 'I did everything that was bad'.⁸² Malika el Aroud's life as a child of immigrants who is caught between cultures is not dissimilar to that of many who become radicalized in Europe.⁸³ There is a strong sense of dissatisfaction within her story. Therefore she is a distinctly 'European' product: not located within the Orient to explain her story but within our own western culture of which she is simultaneously a part of and separate from.

Accounting for the Female Jihadi

The explanations for the rise in female jihadis appear to be somewhat contradictory. The relevant narratives often reproduce gender-based notions of behaviour which rely on emotions such as revenge or love to explain away the turn to violence. Whilst passivity is striking in the account which is given of Al-Rishawi, el Aroud is somewhat different. Through her writing she elicits a different response: in being vocal and active she has successfully re-shaped our view of Muslim women. The Oriental discourse has also broken down. Hence Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi is construed as part strategic weapon and part revenge seeking relative. In all these explanations we hear very little from the protagonist; indeed we know very little about her. The disruption that she causes to the discourse of the War on Terror is nullified because her actions can be construed as the outcome of passivity and utilization. Malika el Aroud on the other hand is depicted as an icon, different from other female jihadis. But none of the narratives rely upon Orientalist notions of Muslim women to explain or understand their actions.

The limits of culturally based explanations are further exposed by cases of female jihadis who are white women born in western countries and then convert to Islam. The two most notable cases are Muriel Degauque from Belgium and Colleen LaRose from the US. What can they gain from joining the jihad? Their subjectivity is defined by western liberal standards meaning that they have no reason to resort to violence because they are recipients of democracy and women's rights. Instead they are thought of as somehow deviant. Degauque is described as 'brainwashed'⁸⁴ by 'Muslim men: a Turk, an Algerian, and finally a Belgian of Moroccan descent'.⁸⁵ LaRose is noted as being a 'woman who spent much of her time alone at home on the computer'.⁸⁶ We have no better understanding of these two women, who are products of our culture than those who are part of

another culture. Furthermore what is also evident yet again is the idea of female vulnerability: their abnormal behaviour comes as a result of their weakness as women. Where does this leave western understandings of Muslim women fighters? Not only are current conceptualizations of female jihadis in need of re-thinking but notions of who 'we' are in relation to the 'other' are also being destabilized.

The Universality of the Feminine Ideal

Despite the differences between all four cases, a common link is their gender. Eileen MacDonald argues 'Men are traditionally seen as having a certain familiarity with violence...women by contrast, are associated with nurturing and caring.'⁸⁷ When women become terrorists they violate their own subjectivity. Hence the question is always raised, 'why would a woman do this'? Explanations always reassert their identity as a female:

One can begin to see why a woman fighter should be more feared than a man: she views her cause as a surrogate child – one for which she may have sacrificed authentic maternal feelings – that must be protected at all costs and she starts off with a capacity for deeper commitment in the first place.⁸⁸

The reification of agents of political violence as distinctly 'female' is symptomatic of the ways in which we conceptualize women fighters. 'They don't fight because they are women' and 'they fight because they are women' are merely two sides of the same argument. In other words there is deemed to be something inherent in their identities which compels or prevents them acting in certain ways. The Institute for Women's Policy Research claims 'For women, radicalism often stems from a desire to protect their homes and communities in times of economic and political insecurity.' Furthermore, 'But it is the men who comprise the overwhelming majority of individuals who practise terror.'⁸⁹ Ergo women often engage in violence when their home and communities are threatened and they want to protect them. They are never construed as the aggressor unlike men. Therefore when women present a disruption to the prevailing discourse on gender by transgressing their subjectivity this is disciplined via the reassertion of their feminine characteristics as a cause of their actions.

Jessica Davis argues 'Stereotypes about the 'type' of woman who commits terrorist acts, what her motivations were and whether or not she suffered abuse as a child are often the most reported aspects of a female terrorist attack.'⁹⁰ The assumptions on which these questions are based are that women aren't supposed to be violent; hence something else must be responsible for the corruption of the supposedly feminine ideal. All these suppositions rest on an essentialized view of gender, that there are quantifiable characteristics which constitute 'men' and 'women'. Judith Butler, drawing on the work of Foucault argues '...there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the

category of women'.⁹¹ Although feminists initially tried to make a distinction between the sex (materiality) and gender (as social construct) to capture the 'reality' of the body, this seemed an untenable position. Indeed the 'sex' of an individual should not be viewed as pre-discursive reality, but a regulative phenomenon which produces the subject. Butler echoes this sentiment when she claims that the concept of sex is 'performative' and that it is the 'cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies'.⁹² Therefore the naturalization of the differences of men and women based on material realities forms our opinions of the proper actions of both subjects.

Subsequently women are seen to be mothers, docile nurturers, and homemakers. There is still some inherent revulsion at the idea that women can give birth but also commit murder. Macdonald outlines this view 'I read numerous articles that have been written about the actions of women and found that in the main they concentrated in asking – chiefly in terms of horror and outrage – 'How could a woman do this'?'⁹³ Al-Rishawi and Degauque did not just commit acts of physical violence but in the process also did violence to our collective understanding of femininity. This epistemic gap is not filled with greater critical reflection on our assumptions on gender but merely sees the reproduction of gendered stereotypes to explain their behaviour. Thus women who engage in political violence are never considered in the same way as their male counterparts. Normally male terrorists are recognized as political actors rather than being viewed through the prism of gender. This is a luxury that is not offered to women.

Conclusion

The most surprising aspect of this study has been the disintegration of the Oriental discourse. The female jihadi represents a serious challenge to the prevailing discourse of the War on Terror. How could these women, whom the west wanted to save, be understood? Orientalism should've provided the answers, after all was this not the framework through which all things Eastern should be comprehended? But we should not be surprised with this development: the contradiction at the heart of this discourse is fully exposed in relation to the female jihadi. They have always been beyond the reach of such subjection; this is not to say that the Oriental Muslim woman has never existed in the western imagination. No, the distinction is a subtler one. The Oriental woman ceases to be the instant she demonstrates any kind of agency because in that moment she becomes something else. This knowledge of who she has become, has always, been beyond the reach of the Oriental discourse and constructions of her have thus been brittle. As such the female jihadi presents an insurmountable challenge to the Oriental discourse and accordingly other narratives have been used to reconcile her existence within western understandings. This is where constructions of gender, which appear to have somewhat universal appeal, come into play.

It is revealing that the literature regarding female terrorists is preoccupied with the gender of the agents whereas there is no comparable trend when discussing male terrorists. In fact the sheer diversity of women who become involved in terrorism tells us that it is difficult to make any kind of generalization. Young, old, American, Belgian, Iraqi, educated and illiterate, there is no obvious predictor as to who will become a terrorist. It seems that women contravene some fundamental understanding about there being which needs urgent explanation when they become violent. This point is a reflection of the contingency of our knowledge when trying to understand what it means to be 'male' or 'female'. These subjects are in constant need of production. People and events do not have an inherent meaning but rather this is something which is ascribed to them via a discursive social exchange. The significance of the female jihadi is not self-evident but only comes into perspective through preconceived notions about gender and culture.

Notes

¹ The author recognises the highly problematic use of terms such as the 'west' or 'western audiences' or 'western consciousness'. Indeed these categorizations run counter to the ethos of this investigation which seeks to destabilize such essentialized understandings of culture. However due to the limitations of this chapter I cannot discuss this issue at any reasonable length.

² The War on Terror is defined as the period between 9/11 and current counterterrorism operations in 2010. It marks the beginning of a new era of US led military and cultural interventions into the so-called 'Islamic world'. For a deeper understanding of the 'War on Terror' discourse, see Jackson, R. 2005. *Writing the War on Terror. Language, Politics and Counter-terrorism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

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¹² Edward Said, E. 2003. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin. There are varying 'Orientalisms', which emerge from the UK, US, and France. There are also different strands of Oriental knowledge. However for the purposes of this investigation the 'Oriental discourse' will refer to the sum of western understanding of Middle Eastern cultures.

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¹⁹ Zine. Muslim Women, 3.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*, 25–28.

²² Ibid., 177.

²³ Ibid., 183.

²⁴ Hunt, K 2006. Embedding Feminism in the War on Terror, in *(En) Gendering the War on Terror*, edited by Hunt and Rygiel, 51.

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²⁶ Laura Bush cited in: Kapur, R. 2002. Un-Veiling Women's Rights in the 'War on Terror'. *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy* 9(211), 211.

²⁷ Hunt. Embedding Feminism in the War on Terror, 53.

²⁸ Kapur. Un-Veiling Women's Rights, 217.

²⁹ Lughod. Do Muslims Women Really Need Saving?, 784.

³⁰ Kapur. Un-Veiling Women's Rights, 220.

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Chapter 9

Afterword: Knowing Knowing al-Qaeda

Alan Cromartie

This book has been devoted to a succession of critiques of ‘knowing al-Qaeda’: it has examined various discursive practices by which the 9/11 attacks have been made manageably knowable. The result is a series of studies of Western ways of talking and of thinking as they attempt to handle something frightening and new. In trying to know knowing al-Qaeda, we take an opportunity to try to know ourselves.

The nature of this second-order project – discursive reflections on discourse – implies the possibility of third- and higher-order counterparts. The authors have not claimed, and would not claim, that they themselves have no presuppositions, but it may make a useful book more useful to state some facts about their own perspectives. One obvious point worth noting is that (with one partial exception), they write in the setting of Anglo-Saxon higher education; they are subject, in fact, to the pressures imposed by cultural institutions within which invisible forces notoriously produce a marked homogeneity of outlook. That moral and political consensus – secular, loosely liberal, and moderately social-democratic – is plainly remote from the attitudes of a religious actor who prizes and embraces martyrdom.

One mark of these perspectives is that the book assumes that ‘the attack of 9/11 was an act as terrifying as it appeared to be meaningless’; and that the various contributors have on the whole examined forms of discourse whose intellectual starting-point was simple bafflement. In doing so, they reproduce some of the oddity of texts that ignore bin Laden’s own pellucid explanation – ‘Why are we attacking and opposing you? The answer is very simple: because you attacked us and continue to attack us’¹ – and strands of Western thinking that have accepted it. But they have surely been quite right to focus on the determination of conventional responses to picture what occurred as *alien*. As Hellmich points out, the tendency of any such account is to place al-Qaeda ‘at some remove from the mainstream of human affairs’ and in so doing discourage speculation about the nature of its grievances. As several other contributors have noted, this tendency is reinforced by a marked emphasis upon the visual – literally upon snapshots of what is going on – at the expense of textual exposition. It is curious and surely revealing that an Americanized date – in other words, an isolated moment – should be the accepted shorthand for what happened.

The book’s main further postulate has been that 9/11 is a particularly threatening challenge to Western understandings of the ‘political’. Here too, it reproduces a convenient simplification in setting aside elements in major Western cultures that have, till very recently, inspired self-sacrifice that might include the laying down

of life. To take a fairly obvious example, there is probably general agreement that Rupert Brooke's war poetry is reprehensibly silly in its dismissal of the pain of war as 'only agony, and that has ending; /And the worst friend and enemy is but Death'.² But the idea that he expressed is quite intelligible. So too is the thought, which pervades his sonnet-sequence, that death in war involves us in a triumph over time (a thought still invoked, in middle-class churchgoing England, in collective recitation, every Remembrance Day, of lines from Laurence Binyon's 'For the Fallen': 'they shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old/Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn').³ The opening years of the First World War are a good hunting ground for ultra-nationalist absurdities (one could, of course, find similar examples from every major European country). But the point is not that such ideas are *typically* Western, but that the attitudes involved can readily be grasped by Western readers; within their acquired civic context, Binyon's lines are still affecting, especially, as recently, in wartime. The point is reinforced when it is grasped that though Brooke and Binyon chose language with religious resonance, the political gist of their poems is largely secular: their ultimate value is not the Almighty, but 'England'. They probably accepted a suicide taboo they took from more traditional religion, but there seems no good reason why people who thought as they did should not have admired expressive self-destruction; al-Qaeda is at its most 'modern' in its abandonment of the constraints that Islam too has placed upon suicide tactics.

We can, in other words, give more precision to the claim that 9/11 represents a challenge to Western understandings of 'the political'. It represents a challenge to forms of politics that are conducted in a liberal framework – in other words, to politics conceived of as excluding appeals to an over-riding value (like God, or national identity, or Marxist visions of emancipation) requiring radical self-sacrifice. In a passage rightly singled out within the Introduction, Michael Ignatieff maintained that 'September 11 was not politics by other means'. He went on to explain that

What we are up against is apocalyptic nihilism. The nihilism of their means – the indifference to human costs – takes their actions not only out of the realm of politics, but even out of the realm of war itself. The apocalyptic nature of their goals makes it absurd to believe they are making political demands at all. They are seeking the violent transformation of an irremediably sinful and unjust world. Terror does not express a politics, but a metaphysics, a desire to give ultimate meaning to time and history through ever-escalating acts of violence which culminate in a final battle between good and evil. People serving such exalted goals are not interested in mere politics.⁴

Ignatieff was making two points. One, which seems dubious at best, is that al-Qaeda's means were 'nihilistic' because they bespoke 'indifference to human costs'. It is possible the bombers were indeed indifferent, but he supplies no evidence for such an imputation. In any case, it seems unfair not to extend to them

the charity expected (say) by nuclear strategists; Ignatieff himself has contentedly lived in two societies that have well-known security arrangements that threaten death to tens of millions. The other (discounting some highly rhetorical language) is that the goals they chose were too demanding to be appropriate to 'politics'. He went on to make a familiar rhetorical move:

[T]he same apocalyptic nihilism – this time in the form of an all-consuming hatred of bourgeois society – drew recruits to both fascism and communism. Liberal democratic Europe discovered in the 30s that such movements cannot be reasoned with. They can only be fought.⁵

One can be sympathetic to bourgeois society – and glad that both these enemies were in the end defeated – whilst noting that this statement is in fact inaccurate: communism was seldom if ever attacked when it could be contained; and in some places (Italy, Bengal), it was eventually assimilated. Moreover, there is little need for any dissident to bow to mere semantic legislation. To agree with Ignatieff's assertion that 'the political' excludes 'a desire to give ultimate meaning to time and history' is simply to deny the adjective 'political' to a wide range of non-liberal objectives.

The 'West' that this book presupposes is thus a liberal West; in its way, it is as much a simplification of the historic textures of a rich and hybrid culture as anything Western writers have projected on Islam. But it has fallen short of its own standards of social-scientific investigation. The rational reaction to an experience that has proved difficult to fit into one's categories is either to examine the experience to see if the impression is misleading or to revise one's intellectual framework. On the evidence assembled in these chapters, 'the West' appears to have taken neither option. Their most disturbing feature is the perplexing absence of curiosity in the materials they document. The simple concrete questions that the editors suggest – Who would do such a thing and why? What sense does it make? What purpose does it serve? – are barely, if at all, investigated; existing structures of ideas persist with the most minimal adjustments.

The authors themselves hold a range of philosophical positions within and beyond the broadly liberal mainstream. But it would be wrong to think of them as radical in method; in chapter after chapter, public discourse is measured by a commonsensical standard. Even Agathangelou's chapter, which is framed by theories about 'onto-slave-cratic-visibility', is filled with compelling examples of the sheer crudity of popular American reactions: an Arab terrorist is best mocked by saying that he smells of goats and camels. Hellmich demonstrates the failure of 'terrorism studies' to do so much as to consult the standard works of reference; Parchami describes fantasies projected on Iran – including the idea of an 'Islamic Vatican' (a phrase suggesting a much older type of godly Anglo-Saxon paranoia) that organizes meetings of Islamist villains; Berger depicts a world of foreign policy debate in which the core assumptions of pre-existing schools are almost

unaffected by the new phenomenon and in which the 'al-Qaeda' that each school has conjured up reflects that school's polemical requirements.

A rather surprising casualty of such analyses is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Said's brilliant book hypothesized that Orientalism was best seen as 'a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts...it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly (or alternative and novel) world'.⁶ Its unreformable presuppositions, first amongst them the existence of a coherent 'East' that could be represented as a unit, did not prevent it piling up impressive quantities of accurate empirical information; the very nature of the enterprise required that the facts be on the whole reliable. Recent attempts to study al-Qaeda are wholly different in character. The 'neo-Orientalism' that is examined here does treat the Islamic East as a unified 'other', but it is comically ill-equipped to function as a science of imperial mastery; nobody ready to believe that Saddam Hussein in person would travel to Iran in order to attend a 'terrorist summit' would make an effective adviser on Arab politics.

It seems clear, then, that the intellectual project with which Said was preoccupied has little to do with the attitudes under discussion. Even if he was right in all his charges, the tainted erudition he complained of was arguably better than the plain ignorance of so much recent policy formation. But whether or not Said's strictures were generally fair, they turn out to be barely relevant. The long and complex history of beliefs about 'the East' can hardly fail to have had some influence, but there are grounds for thinking that recent attitudes have been astonishingly flexible. As Ali points out, few Western preconceptions of the East seem more entrenched than the idea of the passive Muslim woman. Yet this Orientalist discourse is abandoned as soon as the women in question are suicide bombers; in the face of the clear evidence of female agency, the preconceptions and anxieties associated with the Orient are simply replaced by a Western construction of gender. Longstanding beliefs may nonetheless be rather weakly held.

There are signs that the true problem that this book identifies has less to do with prejudice of a traditional kind than with a high degree of self-absorption. The East is not the other side of a near-permanent relationship but the mysterious origin of a surprising shock; it is not, in fact, a constitutive other, one whose endogenous development might lead, over time, to our own reconstitution, but something entirely external that happens, at present, to threaten significant damage. In Singh's 'The Metrics of Terror', the metrics of success in fighting terror turn out to be mostly the measures of things that *the Americans* attempted; in doing so, they unconsciously constructed 'a truly formidable al-Qaeda, one that was the equal and opposite of the US-self.' The strange fragility of this construction emerges most clearly, as Behnke explains, in that rare thing, a genuinely new joke. The joke emerges from the fact that the metric of the threat is an American government decision. The government judges the seriousness with which it should be taken; if these judgements are recorded in a colour-coded scale, the enemy impinges as a

colour, within a language formed of other colours that have an ordinal relationship. In other words, we know, at most, about a relative judgement. We are, however, ignorant of what the colours stand for. Perhaps it is something quite bad (if there were no anxiety, the joke would not be funny); perhaps (which would also be funny) they stand for nothing at all.

This book, in other words, records a failure. Within the impoverished discourses that are examined here, 'al-Qaeda' is a construct that serves narrow purposes; at times, indeed, its only real function is to supply an *ad hoc* explanation of a handful of particular acts of terror. The terminology invoked ('Salafi', 'nihilist', 'apocalyptic') consists, for the most part, of labels that are used to draw attention to things that our antagonists are *not* (moderate, secular, materialist). 'They' are, it seems, 'religious' in having motivations not given by a secularized culture, but little interest has been shown in the subjective nature – the experiential character – of their religion as *they* understand it. Security-minded thinkers have failed in a task that is a precondition for a counter-strategy; they have failed to investigate the meaning of violent acts for those who developed the courage to attempt them. Nor have they managed to cast light on the important question of how al-Qaeda is seen by other Muslims.

This instrumental failure is dispiriting enough. More than a decade after the attacks of 9/11, there has been little progress towards a theory that offers some account of those we say that we are fighting. In consequence, there has been little progress towards a more adequate theory of how al-Qaeda relates to other actors within the complex regional power struggles in which our interventions have involved us. But the instrumental failure flows from a moral one: a failure to look first for explanations that treat al-Qaeda's adherents as rational agents. This ethical imperative is not just sentimental. A fuller understanding of what al-Qaeda is (including the brutality and sheer destructiveness involved in many of its practices) is most likely to emerge from a commitment to grasping it as part of an intelligible whole: that is, as a response to circumstances within a larger socio-cultural setting which can in turn be grasped by an outsider. In other words, a charitable bias is both a force in favour of a rounded explanation that links the new phenomenon with its environment and a force against such shortcuts as 'fundamentalist' or 'nihilist'. The point of the commitment is not just – though this is important – to treat others with respect, but to create a motive for holistic explanation: for seeing others, and ourselves, within a larger context. The idea that al-Qaeda is a pathology – that it defies a rational reconstruction – has handed the problem over to closed subdisciplines of the type that are examined in these pages. If 'we' are to cope better with our bewilderment, we need to hold our thinking to a higher moral standard.

Notes

¹ Bin Laden, O. 2005. 'To the Americans, October 6, 2002', in *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, edited by B. Lawrence. London: Verso, 162.

² Brooke, R. 1987. *The Collected Poems*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 312.

³ Binyon, L. 1931. *Collected Poems of Laurence Binyon: Lyrical poems*. London: Macmillan, 210.

⁴ Ignatieff, M. 2001. 'It's War – But it Doesn't Have to be Dirty'. *The Guardian*, 15 October. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/oct/01/afghanistan.terrorism9> [accessed: 15 June 2011].

⁵ Ignatieff. 'It's War – But it Doesn't Have to be Dirty'.

⁶ Said, E.W. 1991. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Penguin, 12.

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